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The image shows the front cover of a book titled "THE GOLDEN SHAFT". The cover is a deep red color with intricate black line art. The title is centered in a large, ornate, blackletter-style font. "THE" is in a smaller font above "GOLDEN", which is above "SHAFT". The words "GOLDEN" and "SHAFT" are each enclosed in a decorative horizontal banner with a scalloped top edge. The entire title is framed by a rectangular border with decorative corner pieces. In the upper left corner, there is a small, detailed illustration of a figure, possibly a saint or a historical figure, surrounded by foliage. In the lower right corner, there is a larger, more complex illustration featuring a central figure, possibly a woman, surrounded by a dense arrangement of leaves and branches. The spine of the book is visible on the left side, showing a similar red color and some decorative elements, including a small label near the top and a larger one near the bottom.

THE
GOLDEN
SHAFT



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THE GOLDEN SHAFT.

BY

G. CHRISTOPHER DAVIES,

AUTHOR OF "MOUNTAIN, MEADOW AND MERE."

"Oh, she that hath a heart of that fine frame
To pay this debt of love but to a brother,
How will she love, when the *rich golden shaft*
Hath killed the flock of all affections else
That live in her ; when liver, brain, and heart,
These sovereign thrones, are all supplied, and filled,
(Her sweet perfections) with one self king !"

TWELFTH NIGHT—ACT I. SCENE I.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON: RICHARD BENTLEY & SON,

NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1875.

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251. b. 607.

TO
MY FATHER AND MOTHER,
I DEDICATE THESE VOLUMES.
G. C. D.



THE GOLDEN SHAFT.

CHAPTER I.

IT was six o'clock on a bright May morning. The sunlight streamed through the bedroom window, and in a few minutes more the sunbeam, which irradiated a space of the wall above the head of the bed, would fall upon the sleeper's face and awake him. The occupant of the bed was a boy of fifteen. He lay with one hand stretched beyond his head and clasping the

iron bars of the bedstead, the other hanging over the edge of the bed. His head had slipped from the pillow, and lay back in an attitude of unconscious grace. You could see that he was very tall for his age, and slenderly built.

Looking at him as he lay there, with the light just touching his auburn hair, you would have called him a handsome boy, yet you would have found it difficult to say in what his handsomeness rested. His features were irregular, the mouth—that wonderful index of character—was, so to speak, feeble, and the lips were indicative of petulance. But the eyes were large and good, and when they open presently we shall see they are of a good honest grey. His forehead was ample, rather too large indeed, did not his clustering curls fall over it, and so destroy its regularity.

I dwell so much upon the personal

appearance of Harold Featherstonhaugh, because he is to be the hero of my book, because he is, or was, a real personage, and because I want the reader to have a clear idea of him to start with, instead of forming a totally independent conception of his own. A short, stout, dark hero, would not act as Harold will act, and what I say of Harold would not be quite true of any other.

Harold Featherstonhaugh is at this moment waking on the morning of what will be to him, a memorable day. For a few years, we will follow him and his fortunes among his fellow-men, and see what we shall see.

While Harold is blinking his eyes in the sunshine, let us glance at his room. The adornment of a man's room is a pretty sure index to his tastes. Harold was too young to begin to ornament his room with fancy

pictures, pipe-racks and bookcases. Besides, this was his bedroom, and he had a mother who had a pious horror of "litter." Still he kept his belongings here. In one corner are two or three fishing-rods, in another a double-barreled gun of Swiss manufacture, and very small bore—number sixteen I think. This was borrowed for rabbiting and hedge-popping purposes.

Across the iron uprights of the bed a fishing-line had been wound to dry, and a creel hung from a nail in the door. So you see he was an angler and a gunner. In another corner was a canoe-paddle, and a tiny blue silk flag was stuck in an ornament on the mantel-piece. A pair of iron dumb-bells lay side by side on the floor, and if you had lifted the sofa-cushion, you would have seen in the hollow, under the webbing, a pair of single-sticks, and a set

of boxing-gloves. Observing his slight and delicate figure, you would have been astonished at the tokens of such athletic pursuits.

One word as to Harold's position in life, and I have done with the prelude. His father was a gentleman of small means, who had settled in the quiet country town of Overslie. His wife, his son, Harold, and his two daughters, Maud and Mary, both younger than Harold, comprised his family. Not having been brought up to any profession himself, he was keenly alive to the importance of his son being better provided for, but as yet, nothing had been decided upon and Harold was still at school.

Harold was now broad awake and sitting up in bed. There was a holiday at school, and his thoughts were cheerful enough as he reflected upon the absence of lessons, and

the rareness of a holiday upon Greek days (Greek was his abomination). The day, too, promised to turn out a good fishing day, and he looked forward with zest to a long ramble up to the carp pool, and glorious birds'-nesting in the fir woods and the rocks about. Suddenly his fair young face clouded. The remembrance of a conversation which had happened the day before annoyed him.

An old friend of his father's had spoken of him, before his face, as a "delicate boy, not overstrong, who must mind and not overdo himself," and more to the same effect. This was a source of exquisite annoyance to the sensitive Harold, whose vanity it was to be accounted strong, and *facile princeps* in all out-door sports. His rapid growth—he was nearly six feet high—had not, of course, given him, as yet, any breadth, and although he was active and

healthy, he was not by any means robust, although he wished to be thought so.

It was too early to get up. He could not get his breakfast before eight, so he sat, nursing his knee and thinking.

"I hope it will keep fine all day. I wonder if anybody has twigged the night-lines. What a jolly lot of fish we shall get if they haven't. That old Marston's a conceited fool. All fat people think thin people can't be strong. I think my muscle's as hard as his," (giving the bolster a vicious hit with his slender arm). "I should like to have the gloves on with him. Wouldn't I take it out of him rather."

Reaching his rod from the corner, he put it together, endangering the things on the dressing-table with its top joint.

"I wish the Pater would buy me a new rod. This is sure to go at the middle joint,

if I get hold of a big fish. He's so stingy with the pocket money. Other fellows have as much as they like. Not a bad dad either," suddenly, and with a revulsion of feeling at having judged his father, whom he loved very dearly, too harshly. "I daresay he gives me as much as he can afford, and I've got a jolly lot of things as it is. I'll be hanged if I don't make a rod, I think I can. I made a boat, and that was a jolly sight harder to make."

Then after a pause he went on talking to himself.

"I wish I could earn some money somehow. If I could only write a book, or an article for a magazine! I know a lot about several things—electricity, birds' eggs, fishing, heaps of things, if I could only put it together. By-the-by, I wonder if I am what they call a Jack of all trades and master of none. Never mind—there aren't

many fellows of my age who can do what I can."

With which very self-satisfied and conceited expression of opinion, he lay back, and "snoozled" for another hour before turning out.

His breakfast was scarcely over before the garden gate swung on its hinges, and a knock at the door announced the arrival of his two companions, Williams secundus and Hardy senior. They were fully equipped with rods, baskets, climbing irons, and egg boxes.

"Now then, Feather, time's up."

"I'm ready," said Harold, swallowing a mouthful of bread and butter, and a gulp of coffee at one and the same time.

"Take your overcoat, Harold," said his mother.

"Why, mother, fancy walking five miles up the hills in an overcoat!"

"You will want it coming back at night, dear, and mind and don't get your feet wet," she replied with maternal solicitude.

"Oh, mother, I wish you wouldn't bother," said Harold in a pet, deeming that he was quite old enough to take care of himself, and bolting out to escape any further demands upon his patience.

When he had gone, there was a little moisture in his mother's eye. She said to her husband.

"I wish Harold were not so headstrong. He is very trying at times."

"Have patience, my love," he replied. "I think he has the making of a man in him. He will grow wiser as he grows older."

Meanwhile the boys settled between themselves that parents were necessary evils. Williams, who had been compelled to bring

a mackintosh with him, relieved his mind by leaving it at a public-house on the outskirts of the town. Then casting aside all (what they called) care, they set their faces resolutely towards the Welsh hills, determined to do the five miles, as they often had aforetime, in an hour and a quarter.

Oh, the bonny borderland of Wales! what place is there to equal it? To the westward there are the rich meadows and corn lands of the Vale Royal; the deep woods and game coverts, the hazel-fringed lanes, and the quiet picturesque villages and cosy homesteads. All is full of richness, and softness, beauty of colour, and musical sounds of birds singing, brooks murmuring, and bees humming round the limes.

To the eastward, there are the "splendid glens instinct with magic beauty;" the

sweet scented fir woods, the brilliant green of the torrent side foliage, through which the foam of the waterfalls flashes in the sunshine, or softens to creamy white in the shade. There are the grey limestone boulders in the midst of the bracken, where the stonechat sits and clicks away, and the pipit drops down to his nest, so cunningly hidden beneath them. And there above all is the heather, a deep rich purple in colour for the greater part of the year, but in the summer and autumn of a most delicate rose and pink, clothing the stern old hills with a fairy robe, and lending such a fragrance to the breeze, that it, like the breath of God himself, can make the sad heart light, and the old man feel young.

Harold was peculiarly open to all impressions of the beauty of earth, and sea, and sky, and the best side of his nature

came out when he was in the open country. His admiration of what men call "Nature" in her varied forms was apt to become excessive. Such a walk as the present was a great enjoyment to him. His quick eye noted eagerly the motion of bird, or insect, the shades of light and colour in the woods, and the kaleidoscopic variety of flowers in the hedgerows. He was the better pleased that the hurry and exertion of the quick walk over uneven ground, most of it up-hill, left them little breath to spare for talking, so that he could indulge the more freely in reverie.

They were passing through a large wood, the path ran along a wide glade, where their feet fell noiselessly upon soft green moss and the brown half-decayed leaves of the last autumn. Wide as the glade was, the branches of the giant trees met overhead,

for it was such a wood as you do not see every day. Glancing upwards, Williams saw a nest high up, upon a horizontal branch. It was apparently a jay's. Although they had, each of them, a sufficiency of jays' eggs in their cabinets, yet they were always valuable for exchange, and the boys stopped beneath the tree. Opinions were divided as to the desirability of climbing it. Hardy and Williams were the "ayes." Featherstonhaugh was the "no."

"Look here you fellows," said he, "we certainly ought to get to the carp pool as early as we can, and if you are going to stop here half an hour, we shall be too late to take up the nightlines. The keeper will see them perhaps. I shall go on," and off he started.

The others followed grumbling.

"Feather's always in such a beastly hurry

to get to a place. It's a regular bore going out with him."

They crossed the brook. The hill on the other side tried even Harold's wind. Too proud to confess it, he stopped, as if to look at the magnificent view below them.

"What a number of colours there are in that wood which slopes up from the brook yonder—it couldn't be more lovely in autumn?"

"Jolly," panted Hardy, sitting on a stone and mopping his head with his handkerchief, looking, however, not at the view, but at the sole of his boot, which gave symptoms of wearing out, and its loose leather catching in the stones.

Another spurt took them to the foot of the steep ascent immediately beneath the pool. Harold and Williams raced up for the first glimpse of the water. Hardy took it more methodically and slowly, and con-

sequently reaching the top in a less exhausted state than the others, was able to put his tackle together more quickly and to be the first to wet a line.

The pool was a singular looking one. It was on the top of a hill and partially surrounded by fir trees giving a very weird and gloomy aspect to the water. It was of no great depth anywhere, save in mud, and a great part of it was overgrown with a dense thicket of reeds and bulrushes, sheltering many broods of wild fowl. In the shallows a heron or two were invariably to be seen, standing on one leg with their usual ludicrous stolidity. It held no other fish but carp, but these were present in great numbers and of large size. No one ever fished there but the three boys, its existence being kept a secret from their schoolfellows, and its distance and sequestered position protecting it from discovery by chance ramblers. They

had no right to fish there, but had taken "French leave" and had so far escaped discovery.

The previous evening, Hardy and Williams had set two dozen night lines along the banks, and the first business was to take these up. They walked completely around the pool, through the wood, to make sure that no one was near, and then, taking off their boots and stockings, entered the water. The night lines were fastened to under pegs, driven in under the bank out of the way of prying eyes, and the only way of discovering them was by wading along—the water being shallow—and feeling for them with the feet.

Hardy struck his toe against a stone and fell forward on his hands and knees in the pool, thereby rendering it a matter of no moment afterwards whether he stayed in or out of the water. He was the first to lay

hold of a line, and a splash some twenty yards out told him that a good sized fish was on. One after another seventeen fish of one to three pounds in weight were landed, to the intense delight of the boys.

The pool was by this time disturbed, and the carp bit very slowly for the next few hours. After a hearty lunch, Harold and Williams started off birds'-nesting, leaving Hardy up to his middle in mud and water in the midst of a clump of bulrushes, over the edge of which he was endeavouring to tempt a big old carp, who had shown his broad back once or twice above the surface.

My lady readers, you do not know the delights of birds'-nesting. I am almost afraid to touch upon the theme lest it should lead me into too long a digression. It is delightful to hear the ringing scream-laugh of the kestrel through the pine woods—to see the nest on some lofty branch—to win one's

way by patient climbing up to it, while the old birds sweep in circles overhead, in a fierce rage at the despoiling of their nest (one thinks not of pity then), to feel the four or five warm round eggs resting upon their woolly bed, and to bring them safely to earth. I know of nothing like it in a girl's life. It may be my intense ignorance of womankind, but I fancy that we men have by far the jolliest time of it—when young.

Well, the two boys meeting with little success in the wood, betook themselves to the rocks. A bold escarpment of limestone overhung the valley. In the numerous crevices of the rock a colony of jackdaws had their homes. Climbing down after these, Williams came upon a sort of cave into which he forced his way.

“Hallo, Harold, here's a lot of nets!”

he shouted. "I expect they belong to some poachers."

"No, they don't. They are to keep the foxes from the earths here, when they hunt the valley. The nets are stuck all along that row of posts you see at the foot of the rocks."

"By Jove! What a dodge!"

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Harold. "I saw a stock-dove come out of a rabbit hole. I'll swear there's a nest there," and he hastily descended to the sward below, and was running along the bank when his foot caught in a gin, or wire snare, which had been set in a track the hares had made. This threw him heavily, and knocked the 'wind' out of him.

When he had recovered himself a little, he picked up the snare and put it in his pocket. He had sustained no damage beyond a severe sprain of his right ankle and sundry abrasions

of the skin. There *was* a nest in the old rabbit hole, and two pure white eggs there. Both were confiscated, as he had not previously possessed any.

Then came the question what was to be done. His ankle was already swollen and he could not put it to the ground, so walking was out of the question. There was a farm house about half a mile off, on the other side of the glen, and it was determined to make for that, Williams running back to the pool to summon Hardy to Harold's assistance. A brook ran at the foot of the hill, and Harold almost fainting with the pain, made for it with the intention of bathing his foot in the cold water. Half hopping, half sliding along in a grotesque fashion, he came in view of a keeper, who was lying on the shady side of a rock smoking his pipe. He came up to see what was the matter.

"I say, you confounded fellow!" sang

out Harold, highly excited. "Can't you keep a better watch on the poachers than this? Look here."

The keeper took the snare in his hand, and after examining it said,

"Sure it wass be Miss Jenny again. I do not know what I am to do with her. Her is always setting snares."

"Miss Jenny! Who is Miss Jenny?"

"She is a young girl wass live at yonder farmhouse. She not care one bit what she do, and I always tell her; but sure you must be hurt, Sir?"

"Hurt, I should think so. Miss Jenny's broken my leg."

He got to the farmhouse at last, and was taken into the best parlour, where good Mrs. Jones applied a poultice to his ankle. He felt curious to see this Miss Jenny, about whom his boy's fancy had been busy at work since he had heard her name. He wondered if

the clear sweet voice he heard upstairs, singing the favourite Welsh air "Ar hyd y nos" was hers. Presently there was a cessation of the singing, and a sound of footsteps descending the stairs. Then he heard the keeper's voice, and the door opened and there stood Miss Jenny—the most beautiful girl, Harold thought, he had ever seen. Apparently about his own age, lithe and graceful, with aquiline Welsh features, brown hair, neatly braided in an old-fashioned manner, and liquid hazel eyes. The boy's look of admiration made her blush.

"This is my niece Jenny, Sir," said Mrs. Jones. "Hold this poultice, Jenny, while I run for some bandage."

Jenny knelt down in front of Harold and took his foot in her hands.

"Morgan tells me, Sir, that you fell over a snare I set—I am so sorry—I won't set any more snares."

"Don't be sorry. *I* am very glad, because I shouldn't have seen you, if you hadn't set this snare," he replied with boyish fervour, leaning forward as he spoke.

"You are very kind to say so, Sir." She spoke good English, but with the prettiest accent in the world.

Harold fell in love with her on the spot, and impulsive and unreasoning as he always was, he kissed her on the forehead. She looked at him with indignant surprise, but he looked so imploringly penitent as he said, "Do forgive me, I could not help it. You are the loveliest girl I have ever seen," that her anger subsided, but ere she could say anything her aunt returned, and she, dropping Harold a curtsey, retired, and he saw no more of her.

His companions had now arrived, and it was arranged that Mr. Jones should drive them home in his tax-cart. After a hearty

tea, they left, Harold thinking of nothing else but this pretty maiden. Good-bye now to birds'-nesting and—no, not carp-fishing. He would see her again, and the carp pool would form an excuse for being in the neighbourhood.





CHAPTER II.

HAROLD'S sprained ankle turned out to be more seriously hurt than he had imagined. He was confined to the house for many weeks, and when he did at last get about, it was only with the aid of a crutch. Before he could walk any distance without pain, fully three months had elapsed. During this time he saw nothing of Jenny. He fancied himself desperately in love with her, and soon worked out for himself such an ideal picture of her in his own mind as

effectually fanned the flame. He chose to think too that there was a mystery attached to her.

How came this beautiful, and apparently well educated young lady in an obscure farm house, where the people, who called themselves her uncle and aunt, were scarcely above the level of agricultural labourers? He did not even know her surname, and wondered at his own stupidity in not learning it and finding out more about her. There was something peculiarly attractive too, in the fact of her being so much cleverer (in his opinion) than other girls, in being able to set snares in so scientific a manner, an accomplished in which he, Harold Featherstonhaugh, was obliged to confess himself inferior to her. His snares were never successful in catching hares or rabbits, cunningly as he placed them in hedgerows and dry ditches.

Jenny's snares were artistically laid, he could see, and he resolved to profit by the wrinkle of setting his own across the "runs," without the suspicious attempts at concealment and consequent disarrangement of surrounding vegetation, which had marked his previous efforts. Harold was a thorough poacher, and was known to most of the keepers about, who declared that "them school-chaps were the greatest trouble they had." I am bound to say, however, that the destruction of game by him and his companions was not very great. A rabbit or two killed now and then by patient watching within shot of the burrows at dusk, when the white-tailed brownies came out to feed, or a hare shot while crossing a lane, which by the way they were afraid to carry home, and used to cook at a gipsy fire lit in an old sand quarry, was the extent of their depredations.

Boys' loves, if they are fleeting, are very real and intense while they last, and Harold was alternately happy at the thought of one day making himself famous and rich, and re-enacting the King Cophetua comedy, Jenny being the beggar maid ; and then miserable and dejected, with all sorts of gloomy forebodings. Mingled with the speculations as to whether and when he should see her again, was the curiosity to know what Jenny had thought of him, and whether he had offended her by his bold and presumptuous conduct towards her. He would not have dared to kiss one of his own class on so short an acquaintance, although he was far from shy in that respect either.

The weeks went by, and much to his delight it was decided that he was not to go to school any more, but was to go up for his preliminary examination in November,

and be articled to a solicitor in a neighbouring town. So that with falling in love and making a start in life, Harold rightly thought it was an important time for him.

At this time, and when he was lying on his back on the couch, weary of inaction, a longing came upon him, as it comes at times upon all of us, boys or men, to do something to distinguish himself above his fellows. In some undefined way or other he wanted to strike out a bold course for himself, and at one blow to raise himself above the herd. He had no definite idea what he was to do. The only thing that suggested itself was literature, and naturally enough his vanity took the form of expressing itself in poetry. He sent his first production to a literary friend of his father's, for his criticism. In a post or two he got it back with the literary friend's opinion very

candidly expressed, that it was utter rubbish. Harold didn't quite think so, but he had sense enough not to be offended, and the greater sense to put the poem on the fire.

A novel was next commenced, and he actually wrote about three pages, and then found he had nearly unfolded his plot, which certainly would not have lasted two pages more. That was abandoned. The next attempt was more fortunate. It was a short tale of adventure. The scrape his hero got into was a novel one, and Harold got him out of it very ingeniously. He fair copied it out very neatly, was particular about the folding of the MS. and the endorsement, and after keeping it three or four days to look at and admire, he dispatched it to a popular journal, and for some months heard nothing more about it.

The ankle was well at last. One afternoon, having persuaded his father to lend him the pony, Harold rode off eagerly to the farm. A boy took his pony, and he marched up to the front door with his best air, his heart beating furiously. Mrs. Jones herself came to the door, but it was so seldom opened, being kept like the parlour, for state occasions, that it stuck fast against the floor. After a feeble and not very dignified attempt to squeeze in through the opening, Harold had to go round to the back, and in through the "houseplace" or kitchen.

Mrs. Jones recollected him at once, and was very proud, and expressed herself so, that he had taken the trouble to come all the way from "town" to see her. Harold assured her that he should not have felt comfortable if he had not come to thank her, at the first opportunity, for her kind-

ness to him when he met with the accident. The young rascal not seeing any signs of Jenny did not feel very comfortable now he had come. Mrs. Jones pressed him to stay to tea, and sent out for her husband, who could talk to him in better English than she could.

Tea was over, and Jenny did not make her appearance. Harold was shy about asking for her, but presently he summoned up courage to observe, with an attempt at the greatest nonchalance.

"By the way, Mrs. Jones, there was a young lady here who also assisted me. Is she quite well?"

"Oh, you do mean my niece Jenny Llewellyn, I think. She is gone to her mother at——"

Harold for the life of him could not understand what was the name of the place, although Mrs. Jones repeated it twice. No

wonder either, for as he sometime afterwards found out, it was,—and it shall have a whole line to itself for its exceptional jaw-breaking character—

“Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogabwlltanybiliauogai.”

There, that is *sober fact*, as the reader will see if he refers to the proper section of the ordnance map.

So you see that Harold got very little by his delicate attention to Mrs. Jones. The disappointment had the not unusual effect of arousing his ire against the one who had, however innocently, caused the disappointment. His time was now fully occupied with preparing for his examination, and he had little time to think of the vanished Jenny. By the time he had passed, he would have told you he was quite cured of his grand passion.

Harold's chief chum was one Godfrey

Evans, who lived in that loveliest of Welsh villages Llanafon. They had been children together at a preparatory school, inseparable playmates and fast friends. After the examination, and before Harold entered the office where he was to be articled, he spent a few weeks with Godfrey at Llanafon. The winter had come on early and was severe. The quieter parts of the river were frozen over, and detached pieces of ice floated down in such numbers, that the spectacle at the salmon weir was an interesting and novel one. The ice would catch on the sill and accumulate, until the pressure of the heaped up water behind forced it over with a startling crash. It was astonishing to see the quantity of ice that came down in the day.

The weir and the numerous natural falls along the river's course were fringed with long icicles and thick polished shafts of ice;

ice in overhanging curtains, and ice in crystallized spray, and each mass of ice seemed to hold imprisoned in it such marvellous diamond sparkles and prismatic radiances, whether in shade or in the ray of the cold winter sun, that you might well think you never saw aught so beautiful. The snow lay deep on the ground, and in the mountain glens the drifts were unfathomable; many a mountain sheep, aye flocks at a time, perished in them, and instances were not wanting of men and women, going home to their hillside farms, succumbing to the cold and sinking into that insidiously comfortable sleep, the merciful prelude to a death that would be dreadful were it not absolutely painless.

The canal was frozen hard, and Harold and Godfrey went one day to skate upon it. They raced along its smooth surface at an exhilarating speed. The frost had

come on so suddenly that the ice boat had not been able to force its way along and spoil the ice for skating. All traffic was suspended. The wind was at their backs as they sped up the valley. The ringing 'scud' of the skates, and the 'whish' of the particles of ice which their irons ploughed up and which were driven along before them by the breeze, like the mist before a hurricane in the Alps, were the only sounds that disturbed the almost solemn stillness of the day.

Past groves of pine and fir, past rock walls, where the luxuriant growth of ferns and mosses that preserved their texture, if not their colour, was embedded in crystal, thickening daily from the freezing of the streams of water which continually oozed from the crevices. Past wharf and cottage, shooting swiftly under bridges where the ice was weak, they went on mile after mile,

neither speaking a word save to exclaim "How glorious!" keeping abreast of each other where the canal was wide enough, one close on the heels of the other where it was narrow. The valley contracted into a glen. The river ran down on the left, lashing itself into foam over opposing ridges of rock.

On the right and on the left beyond the river the snow-clad hills swept grandly upwards, their lower sides dotted with the feathery birches; further up, stretching away in pure white slope and shoulder, without speck or stain, save where the wind had swept the snow away from the brown slate rock. Right in front, high above all, arose the chief mountain in the range. It was hard to say where the white slopes of the mountain ended and the grey of the sky began. They had reached the limit of their skate—the lock where the water flowed into the canal from the river. Their spirits were

raised, the temptation to rush into some kind of adventure was irresistible. Said Godfrey.

"Do you see that V-shaped depression in the summit of Moel Morfedd? I wonder what it is."

"I vote we go and see," answered Harold.

"Do you think it safe?"

"Safe? Oh bother. We can't lose our way, if we go straight up and down."

"Well, I'll go where you go. It isn't far."

Flinging their skates over their shoulders and each cutting a good stout stick from a hedge, they started arm in arm. They were of exactly the same height and build, of the same age within a few days, but of widely different dispositions. Harold we know something of. Godfrey was slow, phlegmatic, and thoughtful. His hair

was black, short, standing straight up and bushy. This, with his large, brown, owl-like eyes, gave him a somewhat peculiar look. He was destined for the Church.

By choosing the edge of a shoulder or buttress of the hill they avoided the snow in a great measure, but still it was very fatiguing work. The surface of the snow had frozen, and through the crust, so formed, their feet sank at every step. As they got higher, the snow became finer and more powdery—so dry was it that it would not adhere sufficiently to form snowballs. Progression was easier, but still difficult enough. At last they entered a mist which they had not noticed from below, as it had gathered around the brow of the mountain. Once in this they could only see a yard or two before them. They emerged from it as suddenly as they had entered it, and found themselves close to the cairn of stones which

marked the summit. Even the exercise of mounting the steep slopes had failed to keep them warm, the cold was so great. They managed, in spite of their numbed fingers, to write their names on a slip of paper, adding the date and the state of the weather. This they deposited in the crevices of the cairn on the summit.

This done, they looked round a moment before descending. The depression they had noticed was a valley between the two summits. The mist, just level with their feet, stretched out on either hand in a vast sea; up the valleys it was dense and white, but most of the mountain tops rose above it. Through rifts in it, which were constantly moving and changing, they caught glimpses of frozen tarns, solitary houses, and once a hundred yards of a distant railway, with a train creeping along it, the most complete contrast to the wildness and loneliness of the

scene immediately around them it was possible to imagine. The sky above was cloudless, and of a pale clear blue, save where a faint flush followed the sun to the west, where it was near its setting.

Harold's mercurial temperament was so excited by the novelty of his position and the desolation and strangeness of what he saw, that he was less sensible of the cold than Godfrey, who had been pacing restlessly up and down. He came at last to Harold and said,

"It will be dark soon, we had better start."

"All right, old man, come along," and off they went at a run, diving into the mist with every confidence that they were going the right way. Nor did they find out their mistake until Godfrey took an involuntary header over a rock, and disappeared in a snow drift.

Harold's first impulse was to laugh heartily at his friend's mishap. He lost no time, however, in seizing hold of Godfrey's left foot which was all that remained in sight, its vigorous kicks testifying its owner's discomfort at this sudden reversal of his natural position. It was a matter of some difficulty to extricate him, and when at last he stood the right end up, his was a very rueful countenance indeed. All his pockets were filled with snow, it had got down his neck, up his arms, into his trousers, and of course into his boots.

The mist was now lurid with the sunset, and it would be highly dangerous to be out on the mountain at night. Skirting the drift, they ran on. There were no precipices for them to slip over unawares, so their only danger was from the drifts and the cold. They had lost their way, but that troubled them little so that they got to the valley. Only

once did any serious obstacle present itself. A sudden dip on the mountain side, running from right to left, had to be crossed ; in it the snow lay in a large ribbed mass, plainly of great depth. Harold walked along it to find out some place to cross. Godfrey, very tired, sat down in the snow to rest a moment. It was so delightful and comfortable, and strange to say, not at all cold. A delicious sense of languor and warmth stole over him. He heard Harold's voice calling him, but he had not the power to answer or stir. Harold came running up in a great fright, and seeing what was the matter took him by the shoulders and shook him vigorously.

"Godfrey, old man, don't give way like this. For God's sake wake up! There's a farm-house close by. I can hear the dog bark." (Did the recording Angel note down the lie, I wonder?) "Take my

overcoat, old fellow, and let us hurry on."

Godfrey staggered on, Harold taking hold of his arm and forcing him to run. By great good fortune they escaped any more drifts. Presently they saw a light, and guided by it, reached a miserable little farm, where it was a wonder any man could pick up a living.

Over "baracaws" (bread and cheese) and "cwrw da" (good ale), and before a warm fire, they recovered their spirits. Their host, who was a tolerable Englishman, told them stories of adventures on the hills in the winter, which made their blood run cold when they reflected how narrowly they had themselves escaped. He told them of the struggle it was for him to live and earn bread for his wife and nine children. All that he had to look to was his sheep, which when there was no snow on the hill, picked up a subsistence from the short mountain

turf grass, and when the snow was deep, as it was then, had to be "folded" in the yard while he got what food he could for them. Such a winter as this, if it lasted much longer would ruin him. He was already backward with his rent, and there was a doctor's bill to pay for his wife, who was one of your "Sassenachs" (English) and not used to the wild Welsh weather.

"I see you are fond of reading," said Godfrey, pointing to a little book-shelf.

"No, Sir, I can't read English, indeed, but my wife she like reading very much indeed. I did walk all the way to Llanafron and back to-day to get her this."

"This" was the monthly number of the journal to which Harold had sent his article. He eagerly turned over the pages. A paragraph caught his eye, which seemed to be very familiar to him. He for

a moment doubted the evidence of his senses, but turning to the title of the article, he jumped up and skipped about the room like a maniac, upsetting his chair, frightening the children and causing the baby to set up a terrific squall.

"What on earth is the row, Featherstonhaugh?" exclaimed Godfrey.

"*My article!*" shouted Harold. "Look there! my first article!" and he sat down with such a triumphant, warm glow at his heart. What can equal the delight and pride one feels at the sight of one's first production in all the glory of print. There is nothing like it afterwards. It is a tolerably lasting sensation too—not half so evanescent as most keen pleasures. I may as well now state that as this was the first, it was also the last article of his which occurred in that particular journal. Although he afterwards became a pretty frequent contributor to other maga-

zines, he never again succeeded with that. He bothered them pretty pertinaciously with MSS. for two or three months, but on the second Saturday, (invariably on that day), after each had been sent off, it was returned with "Declined with thanks," written on the cover.

It was now high time to think of returning home. They found they were about a mile from a station where, however, the last train that would take them to Llanafon that night only stopped "when requested." The station was about three-quarters of a mile from the village, and when they arrived they could find no porter or station-master anywhere near. The train was due, and there was no time to hunt up the station-master, who was probably at the village public. Staying there all night was out of the question. Harold suggested a way out of the dilemma.

"Let us hoist the signal, the lamps are lit. The train is bound to stop then."

"But shan't we get into an awful row?" objected Godfrey.

"Possibly we may, but I'm for risking it. Anything is better than staying here all night. They will be in such a funk at home about us."

At that instant they could hear the distant rumble of the train echoing among the hills. They both seized the windlass, and the red light shone out from the signal post just as the two great staring lamps of the approaching train flashed around a curve in the line. The train, however, did not stop as they anticipated, but rushed past them with apparently unabated speed.

"By Jove, what a sell! We forgot to put the distance signal up, so we shall have to stay here after all."

“No we shan’t; they are coming back.”

And so they were, right into the station, the passengers with their heads out of the windows eager to see what was the matter.

“Now then, what’s up?” cried the guard.

The boys explained, to the great wrath of the official, and the still greater wrath of a stout elderly gentleman, who appeared at the window of a first-class carriage.

The guard took down their names and addresses, and the train moved on, with the boys in a second-class carriage, rather nervous as to the issue of their experiment.

The old gentleman was a director of the line, and upon their arrival at Llanafon accompanied our heroes into the station-master’s private room, where the affair was explained to the satisfaction of everybody, and the delight of the old fellow at the

pluck of the boys. He tipped them half a sovereign each as he said good-bye, and they parted the best friends in the world.





CHAPTER III.

THE town in which the next few years of Harold's life were to be spent, was Falconebury, an ancient city which had seen before its walls some of the most stirring events of English history. Of the walls but a few isolated fragments were left, but its turretted castle still frowned over the good citizens below. The wide river swept around two-thirds of the town, and the park-like meadows on its banks were the

favourite evening resort of the citizens. Boating flourished, and at the time Featherstonhaugh arrived was a perfect rage. Fishing there was too in plenty, and he looked forward with joyous anticipations to as glorious a time as his past school days had been.

Mingled with these, however, he had the natural nervousness attendant upon the first step of youth into the business of life. It was necessary that he should apply himself to work, and in a great measure at once throw off his boyish ways. The struggle to do this, with his natural light heartedness, which refused to assume the gravity of manhood, at times had a ludicrous aspect which struck even himself. He was in that stage—and very uncomfortable it is—which is often termed “hobbledehoyhood,” and as youths at that time are not very interesting com-

panions, we will pass rapidly over the events of the next three years, giving only a sketch of the circumstances in which he was placed, and which of course in a great measure had their influence over his future.

It was not without much hesitation on his father's part that it had been decided that Harold was to be a lawyer. Mr. Featherstonhaugh was one of the old school, and the aversion to lawyers and the law, as a profession, which at one time was so general among all classes of the community, still had a strong hold upon him; but as Harold resolved to be either a lawyer, or—great the contrast!—a sailor, there seemed to be no alternative, and Harold was articled to Mr. Ransom for five years, at the end of which time he would become duly qualified to fleece his fellow-creatures.

Mr. Featherstonhaugh having an inkling

that articled clerks as a rule were left pretty much to their own devices, asked Mr. Ransom to personally superintend his son's legal education, and offered to pay a higher premium in consideration. Mr. Ransom refused the higher premium, and assured him that his feelings of friendship for Mr. Featherstonhaugh would cause him to bestow more time and trouble about Harold than was usual. Very likely he meant it at the time. Indeed he afterwards, when Harold had been at his office a few days, brought him a list of books (which he had that morning seen recommended in the *Law Times*) as a guide to his reading. Further than that he took no notice of Harold's studies, nor did he even inquire how he was getting on. If Harold asked him a question upon a legal point, he certainly answered it, or referred him to his managing

clerk, but it was evidently so much trouble that Harold left off bothering him and pushed along as best he might—sometimes reading violently for a few weeks, but often injudiciously, for want of a little proper direction, and at other times idling away his time both in the office and out of it.

The apparent want of interest which was shown by his principal was a source of great annoyance to him, and did much to indispose him to work. Unfortunately, Mr. Ransom is no exception to the rest of his fraternity. Not one lawyer in a hundred cares one jot what his articulated clerks do. If the clerk is industrious, he is made to do all sorts of odd jobs, the regular drudgery of the office, and work which cannot advance him in the acquisition of a thorough knowledge of his profession. Except in name he

is little better than a copying clerk. If on the contrary, he rebels against this, he is let alone and comes and goes just as he pleases. Parents who pay stiff premiums to article their sons, have a right to expect better treatment for them than this. In London, the case of the articulated clerk is somewhat better. There are lectures and classes for him to attend, if he chooses. Even in London, however, he is too apt to be confined to one department of law and to remain at the end of his five years utterly ignorant of the other branches.

Let us sketch the picture of one of Harold's days at the office, for the benefit of our paterfamiliaë readers. It is one which might represent any day within the first two and a half years of his articles. Ten o'clock one morning saw him at the window of his lodging, which overlooked the river and the

broad cricket ground, rolling a cigarette, one of which after breakfast was the fashion with the Falconebury articulated clerks. On his way to the office "creeping unwillingly," he was overtaken by two or three other of his genus who were also going townwards, loitering at the shop windows, and staring at the pretty girls therein, an accomplishment in which your articulated clerk is tolerably proficient.

"Well, Featherstonhaugh, how are you this morning?" said one.

"He looks as if his cigarette did not agree with him. Are you smoking shag, Feather?"

Featherstonhaugh, who was more often called by the abbreviation than by his full name, replied :

"No, but the smoke from these cigarettes always gets into one's eyes and makes them

smart. I should smoke a pipe, only it looks such bad form in the street."

"I am sure young gentlemen like you could do without smoking at all," exclaimed an angular-looking female of vinegary aspect, by whose side Harold had been unwittingly walking for the last few yards, and into whose face the smoke from his cigarette had blown. ,

"One for you, Feather," laughed his companions.

Harold took off his hat with a mock bow and said,

"Madam ! will you do me the honour of accepting a cigar ?"

The angular female fell back with a "stony" stare of astonishment and anger, disdain and reproof all crowded into one expression, leaving Harold the victor in the *rencontre*, but conscious at the same time

that he had been rude, to say the least, to a woman, with which consciousness few men are so hardened as to be comfortable.

"Let us turn in here and have a soda," said Powell, the eldest of them, and rather addicted to "wet" evenings, and consequent "hot coppers" the next morning.

"No, thanks, old fellow," said Harold. "Ransom will be riled if I am not there before he is."

"Hang Ransom, he can't sack you. It's so hot, I must have a cooler."

It *was* hot, and Harold had no objection to a "cooler" too. So after looking up and down the street, and seeing there was nobody particular in sight, they went into the "King and Ninepins." At night they would not have cared who saw them there, but the entering a public house at such an

early hour in the day does seem inconsistent with propriety of behaviour, and I wager there are very few who would *not* prefer slipping in unnoticed. Hence the precaution they took of just looking round. Now although it is easy to enter a house unnoticed, it is not so easy to leave it. Not being able to scrutinize the street without opening the door and putting your head out, you generally walk into the arms of the very person whom you least desire should see you. It was so in this instance. As Harold stepped out wiping his lips, Mr. Ransom was passing in his wife's pony-carriage. Harold took off his hat with embarrassment. Mr. Ransom stopped and offered him a lift to the office.

"I have no business to interfere with you out of the office, Mr. Featherstonhaugh, but as a friend of your father's, I hope that

what I have just seen is not a usual practice with you. It is not a good beginning to the day."

"I can assure you, Sir," replied Harold, "that it is very unusual. I merely had a glass of lemonade because the other fellows wanted one."

"Well, well, we won't say anything more about it," said the old gentleman who was extremely good-natured, and with a desire to avoid anything like a lecture, said nothing to Harold about his being late for the office, as our hero rather expected he would.

It was the custom in Mr. Ransom's office for a book to be kept in which the clerks wrote down their names as they arrived. At ten o'clock a line was drawn across the page immediately beneath the last signature, and anyone arriving after ten had to write his name beneath this line. If this occurred

often, he met with a reprimand. In theory this was an excellent plan, but in practice it did not work quite so well. By mutual agreement, the clerks used to sign their names with rather a wide interval between, so that any late comer might interpolate his name. On this occasion, the clerk in charge brought the book to Harold pointing to a space above the line.

"No, Smithson, I must sign under the line to-day. I came with the Governor, and he knows I am late. Have you got the letters?"

"No, Sir, but I will go for them."

The letters being perused, Harold was given a simple conveyance to draw. This was a job he usually made last him the day, but anxious on this occasion to make up for his morning delinquencies, or rather the discovery of them, he worked with a

will, and completed the draft before the morning was over.

About the middle of the day Mr. Ransom went out, and the other articulated clerk, Brown, lounged into Harold's room.

"The Governor's gone out for a couple of hours, Featherstonhaugh. He is at a meeting of the Amicable Attorneys' Society. They are going to decide whether they shall bring an action against one of the members for libelling the Society. Nicely amicable aren't they?"

"Why! there isn't an attorney in Falconbury who wouldn't have every other fellow in the profession struck off the Rolls, if he could. I shall cut the profession when I'm out of my time."

"What do you mean to do for a living?"

"Write, to be sure—for the press and

that sort of thing. I shall try to get a sub-editorship to start with."

"I daresay you can write as well as most fellows, or you wouldn't have had your articles accepted, but you must remember that, although you have sweated awfully hard at it, you have only had three or four articles published, and going on at that rate won't keep you."

"You will see. What a swell necktie you have on," said Harold, desirous of turning the conversation.

"Ah, you should see the swell girl that sold it to me. She is the prettiest girl in Facolnebury. All the fellows are mad after her. She is at Mrs. Danby's glove-shop—only lately come there. She is Welsh, and hasn't she just got an ankle!"

"You seem smitten with her," observed Harold.

"Aye, and so would you be if you saw her."

"I have no particular taste for that sort of girl. You know I am rather difficult to please. Very few girls would come up to my ideal."

"Ideal be ——, well—you come with me to-night and see her."

"I've something else better to do," replied Harold, "but what is her name?"

"Llewellyn," answered Brown. "Mind you, she is quite good form. She doesn't spoon with any of us, but keeps herself to herself as they say."

"The best thing she can do, old Brown," said Harold, in whose mind the name awoke no remembrance. "Shall we have a bout at the gloves?" and he opened a locker in which a set of boxing gloves was hidden.

•

"I don't mind, draw the blind down, so that people can't see from the street."

Some of my readers may think these two young men very wicked indeed to indulge in such a "low sport." The other day I asked a most estimable gentleman if he would allow me to take one or two of his children to see "an assault of arms," to be given by a regiment quartered in the town, for the amusement of the inhabitants. In reply to his question as to what was to be the nature of the performance, I answered, "Sword exercise, feats of arms, dumb-bell exercise, and single-stick."

"I am sure the boys would like to go very much indeed," he said.

"We shall see some good boxing too," I incautiously added.

"Boxing!" he exclaimed, in a tone of

horror. "Then I certainly cannot countenance such a thing."

In vain I endeavoured to convince him that the noble art of self-defence was as noble in boxing as in single-stick, and even more useful. He refused to see any similarity between the two, and his opinion of me was evidently lowered. Now, I really think this sort of feeling, although it may be genuine, is not right. At the risk of having my reader shut up this book with a bang, I must express my belief that learning to box should be a part of every boy's education at school. In addition to strengthening the body—and every muscle in it is by its means brought into action—it improves the temper, teaches men to know their own strength as compared with others, and enables a man, if he or any of his womankind are insulted, to take prompt and summary vengeance on

the offender in the old manly English style.

Harold and Brown had a smart bout for a quarter of an hour, and their smiling faces told how thoroughly they enjoyed it. Brown's nose had a knack of bleeding when only lightly struck, and nearly every tussle ended in his parting with some of the crimson fluid. This time was no exception, and the gloves had been put away, their coats resumed, and Brown was holding his nose over the coal-scuttle when Mr. Ransom returned. He came straight to Harold's room, bringing some papers for him to copy.

"Why, Brown, what is the matter?" said the old gentleman fixing his eyeglasses and staring at his clerk.

"Attacked by a sudden bleeding at the nose, Sir," replied Brown, in a very invalidish

tone, and looking as if he were going to faint, while Harold had hard work to refrain from bursting into laughter.

"Bless me, my boy, you had better go home."

"No, Sir, thank you, I prefer sticking to my work—I shall be better presently."

"I think he had better go home, Sir," said Featherstonhaugh, "I will walk with him, as it has made him rather light headed."

"Yes, you had better," replied Mr. Ransom, leaving the room.

"You sinner," said Brown.

"You hypocrite," said Harold.

"Well we've got an unexpected holiday. I vote we go down the river."

"Very well, I suppose the governor won't expect me back again."

So they went, and had a good hard pull, and a swim afterwards in the cool clear water under the shade of the willows. And for nearly six months Harold never heard of and never saw the pretty Miss Llewellyn, his business or pleasure rarely leading him past Mrs. Danby's glove shop.

Just about this time there came to Mr. Ransom's office, in the capacity of a managing clerk, a fellow named Snelling, who by hard work and a wonderful power of toadying, soon became such a favourite with Mr. Ransom and so influential with him, that the whole office felt more his clerks than Mr. Ransom's.

This individual's behaviour to his master was a totally different thing to his treatment of his fellow-clerks. He was most cordially hated by everyone of them for his over-

bearing manner, his spying and sneaking propensities, and a singular habit he had of coming upon them unawares. While they were indulging in a few minutes chat, or penning a private note, or glancing at a paper, as even the best of clerks will, they would turn round and find him at their elbows, and with the consciousness that what they were doing would be reported in the most unfavourable and exaggerated manner to Mr. Ransom.

Snelling would walk as quietly as a cat upstairs and pause a few seconds on the landing, apparently looking at his papers, but in reality, with his ears open to catch any unbusiness like sound which might issue from any of the rooms. After leaving a room too, he would stop on the door-mat after closing the door, and listen for any remarks which might be made upon him.

Acutely uncomfortable he must have felt at times, for the clerks generally expressed themselves more forcibly than flatteringly when they believed his back was turned.

In appearance he was short and clumsy, with a white, thin face, and black hair and beard. His lips were as thin as paper, and his large eyes showed an expanse or dirty unhealthy looking white. Dressed in black all the year round, he looked his title all over, the title of "the enemy," with which by universal consent he had been dubbed.

Between him and Harold there was violent antagonism. One day Harold and Brown were together having a quiet chat on the landing at the top of the stairs, when Snelling came up. They stopped talking as he passed, looking suspiciously

at them. He entered the next room and the two resumed their talk, Brown saying, "What a beastly cad that fellow is!"

"Hush!" motioned rather than said Harold, pointing to the bottom of the door which was about an inch above the floor. The sun shining through a window cast the shadow of a pair of feet across the chink. Harold opened the door rapidly and with as much force as he could muster, and as he expected, the handle of the door encountered Snelling's head, who rolled over on the floor.

"Ho! ho! ear at the keyhole, Mr. Snelling?" said Harold contemptuously. "What a fine black eye you will have in the morning. Serves you just right you sneak."

"I say, Harold," said Brown afterwards. "Did you see how that fellow glared at you. If he can do you a mischief at any time, you may depend he will."

"Let him try," said Harold. "I fancy I am more than a match for him. Straightforward action against meanness and hypocrisy any day."

"I am not so sure of that, old fellow. I've been long enough in the law to see that honesty is very often *not* the best policy in this 'terrestrial sphere.'"





CHAPTER IV.

BROWN lived about a couple of miles out of Facolnebury, and near "The Mere," a large sheet of water where there was splendid fishing in the season, and good skating when the ice was strong enough. The "Mount" was a pleasant place to stay at, and Brown's "people" were very pleasant people to be well "acquaint" with. Harold often went with his friend to stay there for the week end—from Saturday to

Monday ; and it is of what happened at one such visit, near Christmas time, that the present chapter will speak.

A keen, hard frost had for more than a week been sternly binding the land in its iron chains. Upland and plain were hidden in a soft white carpet of snow, warm for the autumn-sown wheat underneath, but bitterly cold for the partridge and hare who had no shelter. I wonder if the hare in the winter-time never envies the rabbit, who has a warm cosy burrow to make himself comfortable in.

Yet though everything was so white and still, and the earth seemed sleeping, there was life enough astir to interest and satisfy such an observer of nature as was Harold. Wild fowl rustled amid the long dead rushes and flags beside the edge of the mere ; and both bird life and animal life are more

easily watched, and appear more interesting.

There is a quiet stern beauty in the dead of winter, so unlike that of any other time, that it is a positive relief and delight to me and has a fascination which neither spring, summer, nor autumn has to the like extent.

Within the house, the contrast to the utter noiselessness of the landscape without was great. Christmas-time in the country, in a house where there are young men and maidens gathered together, with indulgent parents, where there is mistletoe in out-of-the-way corners, and large wood fires in the evenings to sit around and have merry games and happy talk ; Christmas-tide in such a house is a thing to be enjoyed—to be looked forward to, and to be fondly remembered.

Harold's Christmas at home had been a very quiet one, owing to the illness of one of his sisters, and the merry time at the Mount while the New Year was fast coming upon them, was an agreeable change for him. It was made pleasanter by the news that the mere would bear and was perfectly safe. A skating party was organised for the New Year's Day. The last night of the old year fell cloudless, and cold enough to nip off one's nose.

From the little Methodist chapel in the valley came the sound of hymns. Here was a midnight service, breathing a farewell to the old and a welcome to the new year. Harold stepping into the garden to look at the thickness of the ice in the fountain, thought that these people in the barn-like chapel were acting in a manner more harmonious with what after all is a

solemn time, than the party he had just left, merry and happy and pleasant as they were.

Moved by a sudden impulse, he strolled down the lane and opened the door of the chapel. It was very full, but they made room for him with alacrity, his splendour of evening dress being in strange contrast with the homely garb of those around him. The leader of the service, Harold recognised as the village shoemaker, and his uncouth gesture, inapt, stilted language and strangely peculiar similes would have moved many to a smile ; but Harold, besides being too much of a gentleman to allow anything to escape him which might wound the feelings of the worshippers, strongly felt that he was after all in a sacred building, and staying there a little while, he felt a sudden and strong sympathy with these

humble sons of toil. They were, after all, of the class from which our Saviour formed his disciples.

They were honest and sincere in their worship, which was conducted under greater difficulties than that of those above them in the social scale, and altogether they seemed such simple, honest, and manly specimens of Englishmen, that Harold felt he could never afterwards join in the too common custom of ridiculing what is called the "ranting," of this class of Christians, a peculiarity which arises not from any fault of these poor people themselves, but from the circumstances—want of education and so on—in which they are placed.

At a few minutes to twelve every one engaged in silent prayer, and the stillness was very deep and impressive. The clock

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At a few minutes to twelve every one engaged in silent prayer, and the stillness was very deep and impressive. The clock

solemn time, than the party he had just left, merry and happy and pleasant as they were.

Moved by a sudden impulse, he strolled down the lane and opened the door of the chapel. It was very full, but they made room for him with alacrity, his splendour of evening dress being in strange contrast with the homely garb of those around him. The leader of the service, Harold recognised as the village shoemaker, and his uncouth gesture, inapt, stilted language and strangely peculiar similies would have moved many to a smile ; but Harold, besides being too much of a gentleman to allow anything to escape him which might wound the feelings of the worshippers, strongly felt that he was after all in a sacred building, and staying there a little while, he felt a sudden and strong sympathy with these

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in the gallery struck twelve, and the New Year was ushered in, with all its crowd of joys and sorrows looming in the distance. The leader uttered a short prayer aloud, then all the congregation sang a hymn and the service was over.

When Harold returned to the drawing-room, Coralie Brown was singing that magnificent hymn from "In Memoriam."

"Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring; happy bells, across the snow,
The year is going, let him go.
Ring out the false, ring in the true."

When it was over, he was assailed with questions as to where he had been. He told them, and observed a smile go around the room. Nettled at this, he bent over Coralie, and pointing to the open song, he read out aloud the words "Ring out the false, ring in the true," and added:

"It seems to me, Coralie, that that will be more easily done by those people in the valley than by us."

"Speak for yourself, Harold," replied Coralie, with a saucy glance at him. Then she added in a whisper, "You mustn't look so solemn, or you will infect the rest of us. You don't know what we all *think*, and there is no reason why we should not *look* merry. Is it still freezing hard?"

"So hard," said Harold, resuming his gaiety, "that not even your glances, potent as they are, would soften old King Frost to-night."

"Don't be so absurd, Harold. People will think you are in love with me if you pay me those sort of compliments, and you know it would be terribly undignified to be in love," and she made him a curtsy and retired.

The morning dawned colder and keener

than ever. The Eastern sky was a pale rosy red with bars of delicate green across it. Suffused with the sunrise flush, the snow flashed as if richly jewelled, and the trees cast long violet shadows to the west.

Along the canal, the ice boat was slowly dragged by three large cart horses, and the men on board swayed it about to break up the opposing ice, and force the pieces under the ice which remained unbroken along the side, leaving a tolerably clear channel in the middle. The shrill sound of the crashing and splintering could be heard for nearly a mile in the morning stillness.

After an early breakfast, the party assembled on the lawn with their skates slung over their shoulders, and their faces showing bright and happy in the bracing cold—half a dozen lads, and half a dozen lasses, as brave and bonny as any around the Wrekin

which hung like a cloud in the far distance. Brown's two sisters stood prominent in the group. Tall and largely built, but in perfect proportion, clear skinned, and cheeks ruddy as the morn, with calm grey eyes which shone, the sure indices of pure and kindly womanhood. Their ages were respectively nineteen and one-and-twenty, both young yet perfect women—Juno-like, yet with a life and spirit that Juno must have lacked. Their faces were so sunny and bright that sadness seemed to fly at the sight of them. They were strangely alike in appearance, and yet were very different in character. The elder was self-sacrificing, sensitive, but somewhat imperious. The younger had feelings not so easily aroused as her sister's; but when aroused, they were perhaps deeper and more lasting.

Coralie was the name of the younger, and Mildred that of the elder. Harold was inclined to fancy himself in love with them, but could not make up his mind which to like best. They, while liking Harold very much as their brother's friend, had no intention of falling in love with him, and saw through and laughed at his perplexity which to choose.

Merrily gossiping, they stepped briskly along the hard road; over the upland for awhile, looking down on the right over the broad plain, and on the left up to the glens between the hills, which showed more distinct in that winter sunlight than they ever did during the rest of the year. They descended the hill, and passed through the sleepy, pretty little village of Ellerslie with its pride, the mere, nestling among the trees, and nursing its islands with a jealous care.

The putting on the ladies skates was a pleasant operation, as it always is where feet are small and ankles are taper. As a rule ladies are a nuisance upon the ice, they want so much attention and taking care of that one has scarcely any time for practising one's eights and threes, and nobody who is not a good skater can imagine the hardship it is to be deprived of the glorious *abandon* of the outer edge, when curve after curve, circle after circle is cut without an effort, on the polished surface. When, however, ladies can skate well, it is a pleasure and a luxury to see them, and to skate with them.

As the day advanced the number of the skaters increased. It was curious to stop for a moment and listen to the ring of the skates on the ice, diversified often by the disagreeable *scur-r-r* of a fall, and the

laughter which accompanied it. It was a busy and exhilarating scene. The greatest number of skaters had gathered in one place, and it was most puzzling to the eye to attempt to follow any of their evolutions. They might be compared to a cloud of insects, a colony of whirligig beetles, or a flock of starlings wheeling in the air on an autumn evening.

By-and-by people began to play hockey on the ice, and as this was rather dangerous to the lady skaters, and they were becoming tired, they left the ice, Harold and a few of the other men remaining. A proper game of hockey was then organized, the curate of the parish taking the leadership of one side, and Harold of the other. I am not going to describe a game of hockey. Everybody knows what it is like. The two leaders and their principal backers up threw

themselves into it like Englishmen, that is with a will, and many a severe fall they got, and many a hit upon the shins.

One of Harold's men hit the ball to one side, and it went speeding along the ice among the spectators, and both sides, to the number of about fifty, rushed helter skelter after it, scattering the lookers on right and left. One girl, in her haste to get out of the way of the charging host, fell, and Harold being one of the foremost, was upon her before she could get up. At the pace he was going it was impossible to stop or turn, he was so close to her, so making an effort he jumped over her, losing his balance in the attempt, and coming a cropper directly afterwards, tripping up half a dozen more as he slid anyhow over the ice. As soon as he regained his legs, he hastened back to inquire if she were hurt. Her

face seemed strangely familiar to him as he spoke to her. When he heard her voice as she answered :

"Thank you, I am not hurt, but all those men rushing past has made me giddy."

He knew her and said :

"Surely you are Jenny—I mean Miss Llewellyn."

"Yes. Did you not know me? I have seen you very often lately."

"Why did you not speak to me? I am so glad to see you."

"Thank you," she replied, "I thought you would have forgotten me."

"That would be impossible, Miss Llewellyn," he answered, really thinking at the time that he had not completely forgotten her long ago. Now, however, she looked so vastly improved, and so *petite*

and charming that he had not the slightest objection to renewing the acquaintance.

"You are neglecting your game," she said.

"Oh, they will get on well enough without me. I am rather tired of it too. I say, Brown," as that young man came scurrying past in his shirt sleeves, "take command of my side, will you?"

"All right," said Brown. "How do, Miss Llewellyn?"

"Do you know him?" asked Harold.

"Oh, yes. He often comes to Mrs. Danby's to buy his gloves."

"Wheew!" whistled Harold. "So you are the pretty girl he is always talking about."

"Does he talk about me? I am sure he has no business to," she replied.

"Let me skate you about. Put your feet close together and stand stiffly. I will get behind you and put my hands on your waist, so," and starting off with her, at first gently, but quickening his pace he whirled her along at the top of his speed.

"There, isn't that glorious?"

"Yes, but pray don't let me fall, Mr. Featherstonhaugh. I don't seem to touch the ice at all."

"Have you been on the mere long?" he said.

"Only about half-an-hour. I came with Mrs. Danby. There she is, in that sleigh."

Mrs. Danby was a stout, important-looking lady of middle age. She sat in a sleigh, hired at threepence a turn round the mere. Pushing the sleigh on one side

was a young man with a crimson necktie, and on the other a young man with a green necktie, both got up for the day regardless of expense. Mrs. Danby stared at Harold as they passed each other, and the two young men took off their hats to Jenny with an imposing flourish of the elbows.

"Who are they, Miss Llewellyn?"

"Two of Mrs. Danby's assistants."

"Are they with you in the shop all day long?"

"Yes."

"Do you like them?"

"I don't dislike them. Are you my father confessor?"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Llewellyn, I am very rude. I hope you will forgive me."

"Oh, yes," she answered, softly.

As they sped along, the wind blew her curls into his face, his head of necessity being so close to hers, and as they slackened their speed where the ice was rough, his arm had to be passed around her yielding waist to support her. The old *tendresse* revived in no small degree, and he already felt horribly jealous of the two young men, and of his friend, Brown.

The time passed quickly and pleasantly. They had skated away to a retired part of the lake, near where the stately swans swam round and round in their gradually lessening waterhole, in a state of indignant protest against the new order of things. The sun was setting in a flood of amber light, against which the trees and the church were softly outlined. Harold could have wished the moment indefinitely prolonged. The young man with a crimson

necktie came up to tell Jenny that their party was going.

"Must you go, Jenny? When shall I see you again?"

"I do not know, Mr. Featherstonhaugh. I am not very far from you."

"I shall be in Falconebury to-morrow, I will call and see you. Good-bye, dear." She withdrew her hand hastily and left him.

"I wonder if I vexed her," said Harold to himself, "I always make the running too fast. I musn't flirt with her though; Mildred and Coralie would not like it."

When he joined the others, he got pretty well chaffed upon his devotion to "that bewitching young party." Brown laughingly declared that he felt his nose con-

siderably put out of joint. Harold took all their chaff with philosophical composure and they went prosaically home to dinner.





CHAPTER V.

LATE hours were not the fashion at the Mount, and on the night after the skating party, as everybody was pretty well tired, there was a general inclination to go to bed early. Accordingly, by half-past ten, everyone had retired to rest, or at all events to their chambers, except Harold and Brown, and the servants. The two young men made themselves comfortable in the smoking-room, with a bowl of

whisky-punch on the table, a roaring fire on the hearth, and plenty of good tobacco in the jar. Brown smoked a long clay, well coloured at the bowl from frequent smoking, and with his initials marked upon it to prevent anyone else using it. He smoked strong shag tobacco.

Harold, whose head was less strong, smoked Fine Turkish, a tobacco, let my lady readers understand, light in colour, mild in flavour, but hot and dry to smoke. It should be smoked as Harold smoked it now, that is out of a huge hookah, which lay on the table beside him, and the water in which bubbled with a drowsy sleepy sound, as he drew in long draughts of smoke and puffed it out slowly, or with short vigorous puffs endeavoured to make those strange well-defined rings of smoke, which sometimes

float upwards, preserving their circular form, but enlarging and paling away until they become one with the dim haze of the smoke-filled room.

Sometimes you cannot make these rings, at others you do it easily, although you do not know exactly how you do it. Well, Harold was busily occupied in trying to make them, and Brown was lazily watching him. It was a childish occupation, akin to blowing bubbles, but it suited the lazy quiet humour of the moment. So they sat for some time without speaking, one on either side of the fire, with their slippered feet on the fender. They were both of them just sufficiently tired to make the repose delicious, and not so tired as to make every position irksome.

At last Brown spoke.

"By-the-by, how did you come to know Miss Llewellyn?"

Harold started. His thoughts had been following Jenny, and he would rather not have been interrupted just then. He explained how their first meeting took place, and that he had never seen her since. He then remembered that he had chaffed Brown about her. The feeling was just creeping over him, that no one had a right to be chaffed about her save himself. He said, by way of a feeler.

"She is a great friend of yours, isn't she?"

"No," replied Brown, "I was not any more intimate with her than other fellows were. I only knew her from going to the shop. We used to chat together just like everybody does with young ladies behind

the counter. She seemed to me to be rather a superior sort of girl. In fact, when you see her out, you could not tell that she is not a lady. I never found out where she came from."

"I should amazingly like to know," said Harold. "When I saw her at that farm on the hillside, I could not help thinking that she was of better station than surrounding circumstances seemed to indicate. On the mere to-day, she certainly looked lovely."

"Mind you don't fall in love with her," said his friend, moving his chair nearer to the fire-place and putting his feet on the mantel-piece.

"I think a fellow might do worse," replied Harold, following his example, after a sip of the steaming punch. "Supposing she is as good as she is

pretty, I see no reason at all why a fellow should not marry her."

"You would get cut by all your friends if you did."

"Would you cut me, eh?" asked Harold, laughingly.

"I don't suppose I should—but I wouldn't answer for what the women would do. They are twice as stuck up as men are. But as there isn't much probability of anything so undesirable ever happening, I don't see why we should discuss it. Have you done anything for the magazines lately?"

"I had an article in Saturday's 'Turf and Stubble,' on fishing, of course, and I have had one accepted by 'Flagwood,' and the proofs of one this morning from the new magazine 'Scraps.'"

"I thought it was something of the

kind when I saw the package in the letter-bag. Do you object to having your pieces honestly criticised?"

"Not at all, old fellow, I shall be very glad to receive any hints for future guidance. 'The smallest contributions thankfully received!'"

"Well, then, I thought that fishing article of yours in the 'Turf and Stubble' was 'all porch and no church.' You pretend to write about fishing, yet two-thirds of the paper was descriptive of the scenery on the way to the place you fished in. The actual sport was dismissed in a few words. I know what it is—you like to draw word pictures, and that is all you can do. Excuse my speaking plainly."

"Certainly, and you are quite right—I do delight in word pictures—I can't paint with the brush—I wish I could. I should

never care to paint with my pen then, but you see I have to make the most of the abilities I have. When I see a beautiful scene it acts upon me in a way I cannot describe. It seems to *thrill* me through and through, and I feel a positive necessity that I should make those impressions permanent by writing them down. I wish also to make others feel as I do. Those are my chief reasons for rushing into print, but independently of them the thing pays. 'Turf and Stubble' pay me thirty shillings a column, and the others about fifteen shillings a page."

"Yes, old fellow, but you haven't answered my objection yet. Under the head of 'angling,' in the paper you profess to write about angling, and you don't—you write about wholly foreign matter."

"There you are quite wrong, Brown," said Harold, eagerly. "A man does not go fishing for the mere pleasure of throwing in his line, and pulling it out with a fish at the end. The great charm and delight of the angler's life are the varied and lovely natural pictures he sees around him. I don't mean to say that he thinks very much of them at the time he is casting a fly or playing a fish; but somehow, he instinctively drinks in the beauty of the flowery meads, the sunset flush, and the flutterings of bird and insect, and as he listens momentarily to the talk of the river to itself, now babbling joyously over the fords, and then sighing as over dark deeds in the still deeps under the willows which hang over in sympathy, he cannot help acknowledging its mystery and hidden poetry,

and afterwards when the more immediate excitement has passed away, these are the things he remembers and which lend their influence in moulding him to what he is, or ought to be, according to old Izaak. That is why I like to dwell upon what you find fault with; the infinite charm of the *accessories* to our art."

"Bravo," cried Brown. "That is a passage from the last article, isn't it?"

Harold laughingly acknowledged that it was. "But," he added, "the editor struck it out—whether to make the article shorter, or because he did not agree with it I don't know."

Presently after a smoke-filled silence, Harold said,

"Can you keep a secret, old fellow? I

have only told it to one other person as yet, excepting a certain publisher."

"Yes, I shall most probably forget it, so I am a pretty safe recipient of secrets."

"Forget this or not, just as you like, only don't divulge it," answered Harold, who was used to his friend's brusque manner. "I have written the first dozen chapters of a novel."

Brown shook his head solemnly.

"Why! you are as discouraging as a friend of mine, who, when I told him that I had began a novel, wrote to me 'Complete your novel by all means, read it through again and—put it on the fire. If you should afterwards feel inclined to write another, do so, and you may possibly write something that may do good to your fellow-men.' Lively wasn't it?"

"Sensible fellow that. I should like to know him," said Brown.

"You shall some day," replied Harold. "His name is Godfrey Evans. He is coming over to see me soon, and with your permission I will bring him here, but for the present just oblige me by listening to my tale. I want to earn money by my novel, and if I make it a moral instruction book, I shan't do that. People like their medicine skilfully concealed in something pleasant, so I must strive to interest and amuse rather than to instruct. Anyhow, I sent the chapters already written to a publishing firm who advertise that they value authors' MSS., and they wrote me that they were so pleased with my MSS. that if I completed the story to their satisfaction, they would publish it themselves and give me one hundred and fifty pounds

for it. What do you think of that, old fellow?" said Harold exultingly, getting up and standing with his back to the fire.

"I am very glad to hear it, indeed, I hope it will all fall out as you wish, but never desert the Law, old fellow."

"Well, not for a while at least. I go up for my final exam. soon, and I shall then see how the land lies."

Laying down the tube of his hookah, he sauntered to the window and sweeping back the curtains with his long arm he looked out. It was snowing hard. The flakes came down so thick and fast that the fresh snow was already thick upon the ground.

"This will stop the skating. What a quantity of snow there must be on the hills."

“Yes, and if it thaws suddenly there may be a repetition of last year’s floods in Falconebury.”

The winter before, a sudden thaw had freed the prisoned waters in the uplands, and the river Swirl came down in tumultuous floods, submerging the lower parts of the town, and cutting off all means of communication, except boats, from the occupants of the flooded houses. Such a flood had not been known for years and years.

The present winter the snow on the hills was very deep, and it looked as if much more had to fall yet. If all this was carried away by a gradual thaw, all would be well, and the river would simply be bank full for a month or two; but much danger was to be apprehended from a rapid change

of temperature. The experience of the past winter had made people afraid of a recurrence of the floods, and property in the neighbourhood of the river had much gone down in value.

Some, who knew more than their neighbours, said that the new fangled system of over-draining farms was chiefly the cause of the late liability to the ravages of the water. Formerly the water stood upon the land and soaked into it, and comparatively a small quantity was carried away, but now it was drained at once, right into the river, which wasn't big enough to contain all within its banks. At the "Dog and Partridge" old Cubitt and old Shardloe, two farmers of the oldest school, maintained this doctrine against all comers. They had foreseen it too, as everybody does foresee things after they have happened.

"My pipe is finished," said Harold, "shall I have another or go to bed?"

"Toss up," quoth Brown.

"So I will. Heads for bed, and tails for pipe. Heads! good night, old chap, I'm off. Breakfast at eight I suppose."

"Yes, I'll be upstairs directly. I've got an idea into my head, I want to think it out. Good night."

"Fancy Brown getting an idea into his head and wanting to think it out, I wonder what it is," soliloquised Harold as he went up-stairs. "He is a capital fellow, but the very thickest head that ever walked."

Ah, Harold, you have made the mistake that many people make about Brown, and young men of his stamp. We shall see what Brown's thick head will do afterwards.

While Harold and Brown had been having their confidential chat below stairs,

another confidential chat had been going on above stairs between Mildred and Coralie.

Men become confidential in the smoking-room, or over their wine. Women unbosom themselves to each other in the privacy of their bed-rooms. A man as soon as he gets upstairs, makes the best of his way into bed. A woman is unhappy if she cannot enter a friend's bed-room, and enjoy at least half an hour's gossip. Papa does not think, although mamma may, that when his daughters complain of being sleepy, and dutifully kiss him, and say good night, that sleep is in reality far from their thoughts. He thinks when they come down rosy and fresh from their baths in the morning, that going early to bed has made them so healthy and bright.

The fond lover, after a long and passionate farewell from his ladylove in the

solitude of the hall, when she comes to let him out, and the servants discreetly keep out of the way, hurries home, with the impress of her kisses on his lips, and her image fresh in his eye, and seeks no more company that night. Solitude is his friend. He will not even look at her photograph, lest it should disturb the truer and fonder picture that he sees in his mind's eye. He jumps into bed and recalls every incident of the evening.

Does his ladylove do the like? Not she. If she has sisters or girl-friends staying in the house, she goes into the bed-room of her confidante, or gets her into hers, and then they make the fire up if it be winter, or draw the blind up and let the sweet cool air come in through the open window if it be summer, and there they talk. And don't let any vain fellow imagine he has ever

heard girls talk as they *can* talk, unless he has been an eaves-dropper, which I would hope is not the case. When there are no men present, and they are in for a confidential gossip, their tongues absolutely run away with them. Chatter, chatter, laughter, and romp maybe, they are altogether different beings, and more charming beings too.

Mildred and Coralie were having a talk in the room of the former. They both sat on the hearth-rug toasting themselves at the fire, and their talk very naturally was of Harold and their brother, John, (whom the reader has hitherto only known as Brown). I cannot pretend to give a faithful transcript of the conversation. I can only jot down a few sentences.

"Has Harold Featherstonhaugh proposed to you yet, dear?" said Coralie, in the

mind for a joke, "he was very attentive to you to-day."

"No, love, not yet. Has he to you?"

"I have not had that honour yet, but look what he has written in my album."

He had written some simple verses in her album, original of course. It will just show the state of his mind (and I want to show you exactly what he is like) if I copy them here; they are not long.

In Memory of an Evening last June.

Adown the stream the rosy flush
Flows from the burning West,
Amid the evening's holy hush,
On the grey bridge I rest.

To watch far off, with glory browed
The rugged mountain height,
And hear close by, the thrush sing loud,
On branches tipped with light.

While deeper still the glamour grows,
And holier still the hush,
My love trips down atween the rows
Of whispering hazel bush.

The reed wren sings so loud and clear,
A love song to his mate ;
But I am silent, lest the dear,
Full happiness abate.

HAROLD.

"There," said Coralie, "that is as good as a declaration to one of us, if we only knew which. If you remember, we both of us went down to watch him fishing one evening, and he was sitting on the bridge."

"I remember it very well; but as dear old John would say, we are bowled out by this young lady with whom he appears to have been so friendly on the mere to-day."

"I can't imagine! from what they said

she was only a shop girl. I am surprised at Harold flirting with her in such a public place. I hope he won't do anything silly, because although we laugh at him, he is a very nice fellow, and I like him very much."

"Oh, it's nothing serious. Shall I put another lump of wood on the fire, dear?"

"Yes, do, I don't feel at all sleepy. Do you think Harold is clever?"

"I think he is clever, but I don't think he is very persevering, and I think perseverance is the more desirable virtue."

"I wish our John was clever. He is such a dear, good, stupid old thing."

"I think John can take care of himself. I am very much mistaken if he hasn't more in him than we give him credit for. Hush,

don't talk. They are now going to bed."

They heard Harold's room door close, and resumed their talk. It was presently interrupted by a knock at the door.

"I say, Mildred," said John's voice, "are you in bed?"

"No, you can come in."

"Well, young women, do you call this going to bed? Do you know what time it is?"

"Do *you* call this going to bed, brother John? and do *you* know what time it is? Oh! how you do smell of smoke, you nasty horrid thing!" said Coralie.

"Don't swear, Coralie," answered her brother placidly. "It's bad form. Do you know that it is snowing like one o'clock (which is about the time by the way)

and that we can have the sleigh out to-morrow!"

This was Brown's idea.

"Oh, how delightful!" chorused the sisters.

"If you will lend me your pony, we can drive him in a pair with the one Harold has brought over, and we will drive you into Falconebury to-morrow in style. I don't like putting the big mare in the sleigh."

"You shall have him. What fun it will be!"

"Thanks, good-night. Just toddle into bed at once, like good girls."

Harold highly approved of Brown's idea, and the sleigh was dragged out of the coach-house in the morning and overhauled. Harold moved an amendment to Brown's idea. This was that they should drive

tandem instead of abreast, and that he should handle the ribbons. Nobody made any objection, and the groom was set to work to polish up the tandem harness.

It was still snowing a little, and the snow lay quite four inches deep on the ground. They were so impatient to try the sleigh, that breakfast was hurried quickly over, notwithstanding the mild remonstrances of Mr. and Mrs. Brown. It has just struck me, that I have not yet introduced the heads of this charming family to the reader. Let him think of the two nicest elderly married people he knows, and picture Mr. and Mrs. Brown for himself. They do not appear prominently in my story.

Harold and Mildred sat in front. John and Coralie behind. Harold's borrowed pony being the older and quieter, was

placed in the leader's position, the road was wide, and there were but few vehicles out, so that there was little fear of accidents, although neither pony had ever been harnessed tandem fashion before.

The merry music of the bells on the harness rang out clearly in the morning air, and made one glad to listen to them. The ponies trotted briskly and silently over the snow, and the smooth, even motion of the sleigh was delightful. There are few things more pleasant than sleigh driving, and the rarity of its enjoyment gives it additional attraction.

As they neared Falconebury, and the number of vehicles which they met and passed became greater, the ponies became more restive, and it needed all Harold's skill to keep them quietly at work. Although he

said nothing, he rather doubted the wisdom of driving tandem in a sleigh; you can't turn the corners so safely as in a wheeled conveyance. As they entered the town and drove over the streets, the snow became thinner, and the sleigh rattled every now and then on the stones. The ponies were harder still to hold in.

Mildred felt Harold's leg stiffen against hers, and she saw his hands tighten on the reins, and the muscles stand out in his wrists. She divined the cause, but wisely held her tongue. At last the ponies broke away, just as they were crossing the bridge. For a hundred yards or so the street was clear. Then there was a market-cart standing at a shop door, and fifty yards further on, a brewer's dray and an omnibus.

The ponies dashed on. Brown jumped

out safely, with the intention of making a dart at the wheeler's head, but he was not quick enough and they left him behind.

"Sit still," said Harold sternly. "You are quite safe."

Mildred looking up at him, noted, frightened as she was, how his lips, usually so soft and mobile, tightened and hardened; how the brows contracted until the arched eyebrows were straight and stern, but above all, what a light there was in his eyes. She saw, that whatever he was, he was not a coward, and she respected him more from that moment.

He piloted them safe past the market-cart, but there was not room to pass the dray and omnibus, and with all his strength he could barely moderate the pace at which they were going. There was but one thing

to do, and he did it. A narrow street branched off to the right. Taking the off reins in both hands, he threw all his weight on to them, and fairly swung the ponies around into that street. Fortunately it was clear and was steep, and before the ponies reached the top, he had stopped them. Brown came up breathless.

"Well done, old fellow. Thank God there was no accident!"

The girls got out, and went into a shop to rest a little after their fright. The shop was Mrs. Danby's





CHAPTER VI.

IN the suburbs of Falconebury stood a large red-brick house. It had an eminently respectable look about it, too respectable indeed to be *chic*. It was built in a prominent position, and was fully exposed to the view of the passers by in the road beneath. It stood on a hill high above its neighbours, and the drive up to the hall door was zigzag and lengthy. The garden sloped down in a series of trim

and beautifully kept terraces to the road, and the shrubberies were too artificially planned.

The house itself was fantastic in design. It had all sorts of projections, and any quantity of roofs at different heights from the ground, and sharp-pointed little towers or pinnacles, roofed with coloured slates, crowned all. It was so fine and smart that you at once guessed it to be the work of some one who had riches and not taste. No member of the "upper ten," no modest gentleman, however assured his position might be, would build such a house, or having, by any persuasion of the architect, built it, would have lived in it.

Annersley House was the name graven on the stone pillars of the drive gates, and gilded with the brightest and newest metal. Its owner was Richard Uther, a manufac-

turer, one who had risen from nothing to the possession of great wealth. Risen by his own industry, amassing wealth by his own care and thrift, fortunate in his speculations through his own clear sightedness and prudence, tiding over misfortune through his indomitable pluck ; therefore one would say, deserving of one's highest respect ; for are not such as these the qualities by which Englishmen have raised England to the position she holds among the nations, tiny little island though she be. Yet no man loved Richard Uther, though many feared him, and some few respected him.

He was greedy, avaricious, grasping, overbearing and a hard taskmaster. His hand never held forth the gift of charity, save in that ostentatious manner which shows so plainly that the motive of the gift is not Christian kindness. True, you oc-

casionally saw his name down in a list of subscriptions for repairing a church, erecting a monument, or giving a testimonial, and so on; but if you did, you would be sure to see a little higher up the list, the names of some county people, the "nobs" and "swells," as Richard Uther would call them. You would find that the cause was a fashionable one, and so Richard Uther must be one of the largest givers. He sometimes gained a little notice thereby from the "nobs," and such recognition, scant as it was, was sweet to the soul of this man.

Ill-educated, and never taking any opportunity of improving himself mentally, or polishing himself socially, he fancied that the mere might of money would take him into society. It was the thorn in his side, the knowledge that it had never done so.

The Falconebury people were very exclusive, and the poor curate, with a stipend less than that of Uther's cook, held a better position than he did with his fine house and carriage and pair. The knowledge of this was very galling to him, and it helped to make him more sour and disagreeable than he was by nature. He had led a hard life, and one full of care for money matters, and now when there was no need to save, and plenty of riches to spend, the world had no happiness for him. At fifty-five he was an old man.

Richard Uther had married young, when he was in a humble position, and he married a woman of his own class. She was good, and tender, and helpful, but homely and unambitious. As they became better off in the world, he dressed smarter and endeavoured to live in style; but she still

preserved her homely, uncultivated ways, still wore her old fashioned dresses, still talked in the rough dialect she had learnt as a child. Uther chose to think her a clog upon him, he grew dissatisfied with her, dissensions arose, and being a man of violent and unbridled passions he gradually lost what love he had ever had for her and hated her; hated her as an incumbrance upon his upward path, hated her because she was placidly good and he was violently bad, hated her because he wanted a wife who was a lady, and with his gold he thought he could buy one, and at last the climax came.

They had been childless for many years, but about nineteen or twenty years prior to the present stage of my story, she had, as sometimes happens in such cases, evinced symptoms of coming maternity. The devil

within him prompted him to doubt his wife, than whom purer woman or truer wife never lived, and to suspect her of infidelity. It ended in his turning her out of doors one stern winter's night. She went away in bitter tribulation and distress, and he had never heard of her since. He never wished to do so. In a year or two's time he gave it out that his wife was dead, and he sought another.

But no woman could he find who loved riches—he was rich even then, and he had grown enormously rich afterwards—sufficiently well to risk her life's happiness with him.

At last he was ensnared by the bold animal beauty of an adventuress, who had laid herself out to entrap him. She knew the history of his previous wedded life, but she had planned her game, and she played it

well. She did not believe his wife was dead. People go away and endure a living death, and all the while make no sign; but when the real death comes to relieve them from their misery, they are heard of, their death is recorded, there are such things as coroner's inquests. Deaths and marriages make more noise than anything else. It was therefore improbable that Mrs. Uther was dead; but this bold, bright-eyed woman with her gipsy beauty took the risk of this, and Uther and she were married.

Her aim was to gain an ascendancy over him. This was harder work than she imagined, but as he grew older and weaker, and fonder of his comfort, which he did sooner than men who have led more peaceful lives, she partially succeeded.

She was very much younger than he was, and when he was old, she was yet in the

prime of her beauty. At thirty-five, she looked more beautiful than at nineteen.

Richard Uther was ill. For weeks he had been confined to his bed with bronchitis. It seemed as if the end were coming, and the bold, bad woman who was called his wife hoped it was coming. She counted upon the sole possession of his riches. For he had neither brother nor sister, nor any near relation in the world, and she looked forward to spending his money royally, after the manner of her kind, in all sorts of pleasures and wantonness. She looked forward to the loosing of the curb under which she had fretted for so long; but one thought troubled her. Her husband—we may call him such, had made no will. This he must do in her favour. Otherwise she knew, having looked up the law many a time on

this point, she would only inherit half his estate (which was personalty) and the other half would go to his next of kin, or failing that, to the Crown. Then, if she were not his legal wife she would be entitled to nothing.

It was all important that he should make a will ; but Mr. Uther, like many ignorant people, held the notion that he was likely to die within a year after making his will, and unless he felt the hand of death upon him he was not likely to do what she wished. So, as yet it was uncertain how his riches would go.

The sick man lay in his chamber in the hush of the night. The firelight shone in ruddy patches on the varnished panels, and cast wavering shadows across the room. One little night-light was burning on a table

close by the bed, and in an arm-chair by the fire the nurse was dozing.

Outside, the wind howled and whistled against the windows. The snow had ceased, but it lay deep and white on roof and ground. The curtains at the foot of the bed were drawn apart, and the window-blind was rolled up, so that the invalid, as he lay, could see through the window, and watch the dark, hard-edged clouds drifting rapidly across the moon. He lay there silent and still, and you could scarce hear the sound of his breathing. Yet he was not asleep, but with eyes wide open and staring fixedly out of the window, he seemed absorbed in thought. No pleasant thought either could it be that knitted the brows together, and pursed up the lips in that grim way. For him would there never come a sound up the valley "as of music on the wind,"

and for him no call of angels would thrill through the night.

The only sounds which broke upon the midnight quiet were the dismal howling of a dog on the premises at the rear of the house, and the sharp, regular tick-tick-tick of the death-watch in the wood panneling of the room.

The unearthly screech of the owl as he flits ghost-like, over the ditch where the poor tramp is dying, is not more horrible and uncanny to listen to than the sounds Uther might have heard from the couch where he lay, not far from death. The howl of a dog in the silence of the night is unpleasant enough to listen to, when one is hale and well; it is like the wail of the damned let loose from their abodes for a visit to earth. To the nervously sensitive ear of a sick man it carries a feeling even of terror with it.

Still worse is the tick of the death-watch. Only those who have lain ill and watchful, and have heard the beat or tick of this insect, recurring as it does at such regular intervals, and with such resonant sharpness, can realize the annoyance it causes, and what ugly fancies it puts into one's head, and how one fidgets if it ceases for a minute or two until it commences again, and how one curses it for so commencing. Ah me! 'tis weary work being ill!

To-night you could not tell whether the sick man heard these ominous sounds or not. His face was strangely troubled, and he was evidently thinking deeply. How can I follow the thoughts of such a man at such a time? Did he think of his youth—it was not a happy youth. Ever since he was able to work, he had worked and slaved. His pleasures had been so few, that he

could barely remember that he had ever had any. Never for him had there been the long holiday afternoons, whiled away in the play-ground, by the river side, or in the woods where the cushat nested and reared her young. Never had he known what it was to pass happy summer days, free from care, when the hours are too short to enjoy all the beauty and the life and the light of the glorious day.

He had never, in after time, felt the sympathy with, and reverence for the beautiful and good, which gives the greatest joy to a man's existence. To him there was nothing in the evening sunsets beyond the level fields, the lavish bronzes, and golds, and purples of the autumn time. On his ear the sweet song of birds from the fresh spring foliage had fallen unheeded. For him the poet had no meaning, the painter

no teaching. Scarce had he known happiness in his early life, nothing but misery since—for the want of real happiness is misery, if of a negative kind.

What then could his thoughts be about this chill winter night. Did he exult in his riches? What use were they to him now? Perchance, he thought of that time twenty years ago, just such a night as this, cold, the snow deep and drifting, the wind strong and piercing.

On just such a night had he, with bitter oaths and curses, thrust a wailing, terrified woman into the pitiless night—spurned her from the shelter of his home at a time and in such a state that the veriest brute might have claimed some kindness and protection. He had thrust his wife away from him then, with violent anger and hatred in his heart. He had

persistently stifled all thoughts of her since. He had lived as if she were not. Was he compelled to think of her now, I wonder? Was the beginning of the retribution coming? Who is to know? He shuddered violently, and a low groan escaped from him. The nurse came to his bedside and gave him a draught. After this he closed his eyes and seemed to sleep.

After an hour or more had passed in unbroken silence, save for the ticking of the death-watch, the door opened slowly and a woman entered, habited in a loose dressing-gown. She approached the bedside, and steadfastly watched the sleeper for a little while, then she went to the window and pulled down the blind to shut out the gloomy, cloud-barred sky, and then she went and sat by the fire.

"Has he taken his sleeping draught?" she asked the nurse.

"Yes, m'm. He has been asleep the last hour."

"Do you think he is any better?"

The nurse shook her head ominously. "I'm afraid as he is a sinking fast, ma'am, and there's the death-watch a going, and I've heard the dog a howlin'."

"You stupid! those things mean nothing."

"Don't they, mum! I could tell you things, mum, as is quite true, as would make the hair on your head stand on end. A friend of mine was nursing a gentleman—as it might be your good husband—"

"My good woman, pray hold your tongue. I don't want to hear any such nonsense. You can go and lie down

if you like. I will take your place here."

Left alone, Mrs. Uther, for the reader will have divined it was she, leaned back in her arm-chair, with her elbows on its arms, and shading her eyes from the fire-light with both her hands. As you looked at her, you could not help owning that she was beautiful. Her figure was large and ample, as became her age, and full of voluptuous grace. Her forehead was remarkably low, but from it swept such a wealth of glossy brown hair, and below it gleamed such large bright eyes that you almost lost sight of the defect. Her teeth were white and regular, and as she laughed to herself at something her thoughts were busy upon, you could understand something of the fascination of her smile when she chose to employ

it for her own ends. Her cheeks were full of a rich Egyptian colour, but the dark circles under her eyes, and the two little lines down the centre of her forehead told that she too was not free from mental anxiety.

The night wore away, slowly and silently. The dawn broke; the wind was stilled; but the clouds had drawn together and the snow was coming down again. The sleeper awoke. He turned towards his wife, and motioned for her to give him a drink. She did so.

"There isn't poison in it, is there?" he asked, grimly.

"Richard, dear, this is hardly the time to joke," yet she turned paler, for the thought had crossed her mind as she was handing him the water, how easy it would be to hasten his death, if it were to

her benefit to do so. She was startled to find that he too had thought the same.

"What time is it?" he asked, wearily.

She told him, and arranged his pillows more comfortably.

"Am I going to die?" he asked, suddenly, staring hard at her.

She pretended to feel great reluctance in answering him. At length she said,

"I would rather you asked the doctor yourself, when he comes, dear."

"Now, don't play the fool with me. Say whether you know what the doctors think or not?"

"I do know."

"Am I going to get better or not?"

"If you have anything to settle, you had better do it at once. Unless you

take an unexpected turn for the better to-day, there is little hope for you;" and she wept.

Consummate actor though she was, the sick man saw through her pretended show of grief. He had all along distrusted her a little. Now, with his perceptions sharpened by approaching death, he seemed to see her in a true light; the film was torn off his eyes, and he knew—bitter truth—that he would die unloved and unwept for even by his wife.

"You are very sorry, ain't you?" he said, with a ghastly sneer.

She knew that protestations of grief would only be disbelieved by the dying man, and that if she thwarted him in his present humour, he would become unmanageable, so she wisely held her tongue, and busied herself in arranging

his pillow, and doing other little things to make him comfortable.

"I suppose you want me to make my will?" he continued.

"I should think it would be a wise step, Richard," she replied, "but you know best whether you wish to do it. If you don't make a will, you know that half your property will go to the Crown. I don't know what the Crown has ever done for you, that you should so benefit it."

The idea seemed to strike him forcibly. No, the Crown should never have any of Richard Uther's hard-earned money. He was a violent Radical, and thoroughly opposed to any form of Government, but that of a Republic—though how he would have thought if the watchwords Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity had been

literally acted upon, I do not know. Fancy, Richard Uther and men like him sharing their gold and broad acres with their neighbours.

"Send for Mr. Ransom, at once. He is as honest a lawyer as anyone, I suppose. Am I to leave my property to my *wife*, eh? Perhaps they will go hunting for my wife, and find her—not you, you know," and an almost devilish expression came over his face as he said this.

"*You* ought not to talk to me so," she replied, in a gentle tone, as became her interests; but with what bitter, black rage at her heart she alone knew. "You had better not talk any more now. You have exhausted yourself. I will send Morris in the dog-cart for Mr. Ransom. You must save yourself until he comes."

So Morris was despatched for the lawyer, and Mrs. Uther was less in deadly fear lest all her schemes should come to nothing, and all the sufferings and indignities of the past years be of no avail.





CHAPTER VII.

MR. RANSOM was laid up with his old enemy, the gout, and although Mr. Uther's summons was imperative that he should go himself, there was no alternative but to send one of his clerks. The choice naturally fell upon his managing clerk, Snelling. That worthy was called upstairs into his master's bed-room, and received full instructions how to act. He was directed to take down from Mr. Uther's

own lips the substance of what he wished his last will and testament to be, and then to hurry back and prepare a draft, which Mr. Ransom would settle, and then send a fair draft of it for Mr. Uther's perusal before it was finally engrossed. Things must be done in the old-fashioned, routine way in Mr. Ransom's office, and no writing out the will there and then, by Mr. Uther's bedside, and procuring his signature at once, while life was yet in him, could be thought of. Mr. Ransom never allowed himself to be hurried.

Through the deep, soft snow, and in the teeth of the north-east wind, Mr. Snelling was driven to Annersley House. It was not often Mr. Snelling had so important a mission entrusted to his care, and his vanity was aroused accordingly. To see the arrogant airs he assumed with the groom was as

good as a play. The latter, however, was not noted for his politeness, even to his master. It seemed as if Mr. Uther recognised in Morris a kindred spirit to his own, for he stood more "cheek" from the old man than any other of his servants would have thought of offering him. Hence Snelling fared rather badly, and before the short drive was over some of his conceit had been taken out of him, as Morris afterwards phrased it.

Mrs. Uther, looking out of a window, saw them drive up. As she saw that Mr. Ransom himself had not come, but that he had sent a clerk, she began to see her way out of what threatened to become a serious difficulty. In the event of her husband making no provision for her by his will, there would have been no tampering with it, as long as Mr. Ransom had to do with it,

but a clerk was, in her eyes, altogether a different creature. There was no reason in the world why he should not be bought over, or won over by other means, such as she knew how to use. Her spirits, previously low enough, began to rise directly.

“The game is not lost,” she said to herself, “there are two chances in my favour. He may, after all, provide for me by his will. Ah! but after what he said, *and the way he looked*, this morning, there is little chance of that. Or I may buy this fellow over to assist me. Stay, there is one other chance, truly, but a poor one. He may die before he can sign his will, if these lawyers are as slow as most of them are; and then if I can get clear away with the spoil before this woman, his first wife, whom I feel sure is alive, turns up, I shall

be safe. Catch me if they can, if I can get across the Channel. Now, I suppose the first thing to do is to get on good terms with this ugly little fellow."

She went into the hall to meet him. He bowed and handed her a card, on which was printed in large, black letter characters "Mr. James Howard Snelling."

"I presume I am addressing Mrs. Uther?"

She bowed.

"I regret to say that Mr. Ransom is confined to his room. He is very sorry that he is unable to attend your husband on—at—this—this—" (he was going to say 'this melancholy time,' but the recollection flashed across him that it was only a melancholy time for the Uthers; that which brought grist to their mill could scarcely be a melancholy time for the lawyers,

so just seeing the incongruity he finished rather lamely), "ah—time."

"I regret Mr. Ransom's absence, and still more the cause of it, but doubtless he has sent an efficient substitute," she replied, in a sweetly courteous tone.

"Well, ma'am, I flatter myself that I do know a *leetle*. I am, I may say, Mr. Ransom's confidential and managing clerk, and I, in fact, know more of his business than he does himself. Between ourselves, the conduct of the office falls chiefly on my shoulders."

The pompous and would be confidential air with which he delivered himself of this speech would have been too much for Mrs. Uther's risible faculties at any other time, but now she only saw in him an easy tool. She was a keen reader of character, as women of her class often are, and she

gauged his depth in a very short time.

"I am sure it is conducted ably then," she said, with a flattering glance, "will you not step this way and take a glass of wine, while I send to inform Mr. Uther of your arrival?"

Mr. Snelling followed her into the drawing-room, feeling out of his element in a fine house and afraid of damaging the rich carpet with his boots, but resolving to carry himself "boldly and well." In a few minutes she had contrived, by a few artful observations, to put him at ease with himself, and therefore on better terms with everyone else. He admired her beauty, which was more attractive to a man of his calibre than any other type of beauty would be. A refined and delicate man would have been disgusted with the full, sensual loveliness of Mrs. Uther.

To Snelling it was the most charming of any. He was rarely in the presence of any "lady," and now to be sitting close to one, and that a "stunner," in close and familiar converse, was an unexpected elevation.

She took care that Mr. Uther did not know of his arrival too soon, and she herself was the first to tell him. Snelling was summoned upstairs, and sat down by the bedside, with his papers out. Mrs. Uther stood at the head of the bed, and out of sight of her husband.

"You can do it all right, I suppose?" said the sufferer feebly.

"Oh yes, Sir, as well as Mr. Ransom, although I say it, Sir. Shall I begin, Sir?"

"You can't begin without me, I think. Don't hurry me. Is *she* in the room?"

"She, Sir?" said Snelling.

"She, my—Mrs. Uther. Is she here?"

"Yes, Richard, I am here," said his wife, stepping forward.

"Then go away. I want to have a private talk with my lawyer, go."

She went out quietly.

"Lock the door."

Snelling obeyed, thinking that he "smelt a rat," to use his own words.

In about half an hour, the conference was over. Snelling, on his way out, was met by Mrs. Uther. She beckoned him to follow her into her boudoir. He had never been into such a cosy, beautiful room before.

"I could not let you go away without offering you some lunch. Will you help yourself, or shall I carve for you?"

Snelling's mouth watered as he saw, laid out on a small table, a very tempting lunch. There were cold chicken, ham and tongue,

and several little delicacies, in the way of sweets. He was in no way loth to begin, but was rather shy of carving the fowl before her. He was not by any means an adept at the art, and he did not wish to shew his incapacity. So he said, with a clumsy attempt at a compliment.

"I am sure, I shall be most happy, but eh! ah—but if it would not be too much trouble, the things would taste better if you would eh—carve."

"Certainly I will. That wine is the oldest sherry that can be got now. Take a glass, I am sure you will like it. If you will allow me I will join you, and we will have a cosy tête-à-tête little meal, without any servants to bother us."

Mr. Snelling scarcely knew whether he

stood on his head or his heels. To be so condescended to was delicious. He began to fancy he had made an impression, and accordingly strove to deepen it by making himself most uncommonly agreeable, after his fashion. She, seeing this, led him on. Oh, Master Snelling, so keen and shrewd in petty business matters, and so firm and stern with those over whom you have authority, you have no chance against a clever woman.

She led him on to talk about her husband's state, and finally after he had had the best part of a bottle of wine, she learned all she wished to know as to the intended disposition of her husband's property. A few small legacies were to be given, and then the whole of his wealth was to pass to—the "*Falconebury Hospital*."

"Between ourselves," he said, and he was by this time sitting on the sofa by her side, and had got hold of her arm in a confidential manner, "I ought not to tell you what has passed, but you are his wife you know, and a very jolly (hic) sort of woman—lady, (hic) I mean that there can be no harm you know. It's very hard upon you, it's very hard—let me see, what was I saying."

He had drunk too much and too rapidly, and she hardly knew what to do with him. She shook herself free from him, and made him take some ammonia and water, which he did very ruefully, but raised no objection.

"Morris shall drive you out a few miles and back. You will have recovered by then in the cool air."

"All right. I see. Don't tell the

governor. My head's usually very clear, but somehow—I see—Good-bye. I'm not accustomed to take wine."

"Good-bye. You won't forget to let me see the fair draft before it is engrossed? It will be worth your while not to forget," she whispered into his ear, her hot breath sending a thrill through him from head to foot.

When he had gone, she threw herself upon the couch in an agony of rage. When at last she rose, her face was pale, her expression determined. She was desperate, driven to bay; and she had resolved not to leave a stone unturned, by fair means or foul, to gain her wishes. How, she could not clearly see. It would depend upon Snelling.

The evening of the next day the draft had been fairly copied, and he called to see

Mr. Uther and read it over to him. She was not allowed to be present, but she was waiting as before, and again they were closeted together.

"I took too much of your wine, Mrs. Uther, last time. You wasn't fair to let me take it, unknowing its strength."

"I am very sorry, dear Mr. Snelling, I did not notice what you were drinking. Would you prefer some coffee to-night?"

"I should — thank you. Here's the draft. You can look at it. You see it follows out the instructions."

The will ran :

"In the name of God, Amen. I, Richard Uther of Annersley House in the City of Falconebury, Gentleman" (he would have that in) "being of failing health and a weak body, but of sound understanding and memory,

praise be to Almighty God," in which way wills used to be drawn, and still are drawn by old fashioned practitioners, "do hereby nominate and appoint my friends Jabez Sotherby and Robert Ransom Executors and Trustees of this my Will," and after certain legacies to his servants, but no mention of his wife, it ran on: "All the rest, residue, and remainder of my real and personal estate whatsoever and wheresoever situate, I give, devise, and bequeath unto the trustees of the Falconebury Hospital and their successors for ever, in trust for the purposes of the said hospital."

She had formed her plan.

"Mr. Snelling, may I address you in confidence as a gentleman, and on equal terms?"

"Only too proud to have the honour, ma'am," he replied.

"Mr. Uther has taken a sudden and unaccountable dislike to me. It would pain me excessively, did I not know that it is a part of his illness. His brain is affected; there is no doubt. Well, although I am his wife, and have served him devotedly for many years," her voice was very low and sweetly pathetic, "he totally ignores all that I have done for him, and although I refused, when I married him, to have my property, such as it was," it was nothing, "settled upon myself, yet he has cut me out of his will altogether, and I shall be turned adrift upon the world, penniless. I am going to ask you a favour, dear Mr. Snelling. It is one you can very easily grant without doing anything unprofessional, and without running any risk. It is simply this. When you are having the will engrossed, leave this line from 'bequeath' to 'the said hos-

pital,' blank. I will then try to induce my husband to alter his mind. If he does not, I will let you know when you bring the engrossment, and before going in to him you can write the line as it should have been. This is my last chance. You will not deny me this favour. See, I can let you have these now," and she produced four five pound notes. "I trust you will accept them from me, not as a bribe, but as a tribute to you personally and for your trouble on my behalf."

"Well, I don't know. You see it is an awkward thing to meddle with a will. If I did what you want, I should have to engross the will myself, or the difference in the handwriting would be discovered. I don't know what to say. I don't think it would be wrong," he continued, looking wistfully at the bank notes, "but I don't

want to get into any row, I've got my living to make you know."

She sank on her knees before him, and leaned upon his knee, looking up into his face with all the witchery of her bright, full eyes and gleaming smile.

"You will read the will over to him before he signs it. You can run no risk. It is not like altering a will after signature. You will make no alteration unless he approves of it."

"I tell you what I will do," he said, pocketing the notes, as a safe preliminary, with his face flushed and hot, and trembling all over at the audacity of the request he was about to make. "I will do what you wish if—if you will give me a kiss."

A kiss wasn't much for her to give, and leaning forward, she said, "Take it.

There, not another—not this time. *Wait until afterwards.* Now go and be careful.”

Did she endeavour to induce her husband to alter his mind? Not she, and she went near him as little as possible. But what she did do, was this. She had two inkstands in her boudoir. One she filled with ordinary black ink, the other with a mixture of Indian ink and water. The former she locked up, the latter she placed in her open desk.

There were many and almost insuperable difficulties in the way of carrying out the plan she had conceived. She scarcely saw, indeed, how she was to set about carrying it out, but it was her only chance. She knew too well her husband's temperament, to have any hope of inducing him to alter his will in her favour, and she wisely ab-

stained from irritating him by endeavouring to do so. So she waited, in no enviable frame of mind.

When Snelling came with the will for signature, he was shewn into her boudoir. He had left the blank in the will. She said,

"You must fill in the line as it stands in the draft, Mr. Snelling. My husband is immoveable."

"I am very sorry to hear it, ma'am," answered he, taking up a pen and dipping it into the inkstand in her desk.

"Your ink is very thick," he said, as he found some difficulty in writing.

She left the remark unanswered, fearful of calling his attention further to the thickness of the ink.

"Have you any blotting-paper?" he said.

"No," she answered. "Give it to me, I will dry it at the fire. Now you may go into his room. I shall stay here. Be sure you come back to me and have some lunch," and she gave him a smile, the significance of which, she knew, would bring him back as soon as he could come. She knew the effect of her beauty upon such as he.

The will was signed and attested. Snelling came back to her boudoir.

"Well, is it really done?" she asked.

"Yes," said he, showing her the will in the pocket of his overcoat.

"What are you going to do when he dies, now he has cut you out of his will?"

He asked her this, in the familiar tone of one who stands in a superior position to the person interrogated. She was, he thought, a penniless person.

She said, calmly, "I have friends to go to, who will help me, and keep me in the position to which I have been accustomed."

"Oh, indeed! I beg your pardon," he answered, rather abashed.

"Let me help you to take off your overcoat," she said, "and then we will go into the breakfast-room, and have *another* cosy, little lunch." When they arrived here, she said, "Will you forgive me if I have to leave you for a short time? Pray help yourself, I shall be back in a few minutes."

"All right, Mrs. Uther, don't be long. I shall have to cut soon."

When she got to the boudoir, she was almost breathless with excitement. So far, everything had happened exactly as she wished. She locked the door, and sat down for a few moments to recover from her agitation. Then she got up and threw the

contents of the inkstand in her desk, into the fire, and brought out the other one in its place.

She took the will from Snelling's coat pocket, and opened it. It was written on stout foolscap paper. Going into her bedroom, she returned with a damp sponge, and carefully passing it over the paper she effaced every trace of the writing in Indian ink, damping the paper all over, so that no inequality of gloss should betray what had been done. Then she dried the paper before the fire.

The most difficult operation yet remained, to imitate Snelling's writing, and fill up the blank with her own name. This she found to be an easier task than she had anticipated. His writing was upright and regular, and was, so to speak, rather printed than written. Anybody could have made

a fair imitation of it, and Mrs. Uther was clever in that line. In a very few minutes she had filled up the blank so well, that the closest scrutiny would scarcely have detected any difference in the writing.

This is how the blank was filled in,

“bequeath unto my present beloved wife, Frances Adelaide Uther, for her own sole and separate use absolutely.”

She replaced the will in Snelling's pocket, and went into the breakfast room and rejoined him.

He said. “You have been rather long.”

“Yes, Mr. Snelling, and I have only come now to say good-bye. My husband is sinking fast, and I must go to his bedside. I trust I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again soon. Good-bye. The servant will get your coat, if you will ring,

when you have done your lunch," and she swept out of the room leaving Snelling gazing disappointedly after her.

The next morning at dawn, when our sorest troubles usually come to us, Richard Uther died.

The game seemed won.





CHAPTER VIII.

WE left Harold and his companions opposite Mrs. Danby's shop. Harold and Brown did not go in; the former indeed scarcely giving a look that way, not seeing Jenny who was looking at him through the window from her place behind the counter, longing for a glance of recognition, not only because she liked Harold, but—harmless feminine vanity—because she wished the other girls

in the shop to see that she was friendly with such distinguished looking people, as Harold and his friends. She was disappointed and annoyed when he either did not, or would not see her. She saw the familiar air with which he handed Mildred from her seat; but she did not see the warm clasp of the hand—both hands indeed—with which that impressionable young man greeted Mildred on her descent, and she did not hear the low, affectionate inquiry, “Mildred, dear, were you frightened?” nor the answer, “Not when I saw you were not.” Neither did she, nor anyone, know the mischief that pressure of the hands, and that single slip of the word “dear,” were to work.

The ladies entered the shop to make some small purchases of gloves as an

excuse to sit down and recover from their adventure. Brown and Harold drove the ponies to their stable.

It was not until Mildred and Coralie had been in the shop for some minutes, that the former knew where she was, and then looking at the pretty girl who was waiting upon them, and encountering the defiant and curious gaze of a pair of bright, hazel eyes, it flashed across her mind as an absolute certainty that this was the girl with whom Harold had flirted. She stared furtively at her again and again, and each time encountered a responsive glance. Annoyed with herself as well as with poor Jenny, she asked Coralie if it were not time to go, so paying for their purchases, they left the shop.

Let us, in order to understand what happens afterwards, try to analyse the

feelings of the two girls—Jenny and Mildred. Jenny's first.

When, what seemed a long time ago, Jenny first met Harold, she had never come in close contact with anyone so handsome, and, as she thought, so fine a gentleman ; and as her heart was free from any prior claim, and was withal a romantic little heart, ready to love with all its strength when anybody should want it to love, Harold made some impression upon it. His accident, caused, moreover, by her own fault, aroused her concern and pity, and it is a true old proverb that "pity is akin to love."

Living the quietest of lives, with nothing better to think about, her thoughts ran uncontrolled upon the youthful stranger who had kissed her. She built castles in the air, of which he was the hero, and

she the heroine, and altogether she wove for herself a very pretty romance. Not that she had actually fallen in love, but she was very near to it. As time passed on, she had nearly forgotten him. The occasional sight of him in Falconebury streets, of course, brought him to her remembrance, and the meeting on the ice and the attention he paid to her there, more than revived the *penchant* she had formed for him on the first occasion. She saw no great reason why he and she should not be excellent friends if not—although she hardly dared to own the thought—lovers.

To her mind, there was no overwhelming disparity of position. She was partly Welsh by birth, and wholly Welsh by education, and it is one of the characteristics of that excellent nation, that there is a greater feeling

of equality between the different strata of its society than there is between the corresponding degrees of English people. This is a natural consequence of their simpler habits, and their less artificial mode of life.

I have known a friend's groom, after waiting respectfully until his master had welcomed me, come up and offer his hand. Of course, I took it. Hand-shaking in Wales—I may observe by the way—is an essential concomitant to the free intercourse of the classes. If you refused to shake hands with those beneath you, you would be considered churlish and ungentlemanly. On their part, however, it is only right to say that they would not interchange this token of friendliness with anyone they did not respect, and in whom they had no confidence.

The custom is embarrassing at times ; as once, when my father took me to see some mines in which he was interested, and among the miners in which he was popular. On his saying, "This is my son," the honest, but very dirty fellows all had their hand-shake out with me. This digression will show the influence which led Jenny to think that Harold would not be ashamed of an acquaintance, or an alliance with her. Alas, Jenny, the disappointment may be sore when it comes !

Mildred was not what you would call an impressionable girl. She did not fancy that she was in love with every good-looking fellow who paid her some little attention, or that they were in love with her. Up to the present, her heart was absolutely untouched. Although she had known Harold

for some time, she had felt nothing more than a liking for him. He had not come up to her ideal.

Every girl, before she falls in love with a reality, has an ideal sweetheart whom she adores, with whom she has long and happy love-makings. In the solitude of her chamber, she dreams, and loves, and lives another life with one who adores her with unparalleled constancy. Then, when she sees a real being who creates within her heart even the faintest interest, she, if only for the sake of being able to give some definite form to her ideal, sets him up as her idol, and clothes him with her fancies ; only at first, perhaps, as a convenient peg on which to hang them, but afterwards, as her mind dwells upon him, and he enthrones himself more firmly by loverlike sayings and doings, she gives him the very place of the ideal

(its virtues and endowments as well) and loves him.

I firmly believe that most of us owe our being accepted by the wives of our bosoms, to the effect of accident throwing us in their way just at the time the ideal lover had been given attributes, of which we in some small degree reminded them. Therefore, no man can have a maiden's first love. Your hair may be light brown, and your whiskers sandy. Your sweetheart has been madly in love with a dark-haired, black-moustached lover, who has (in fancy) lavished hundreds of kisses upon the lips you now claim as yours. You are short. He was tall. Still one does not mind phantom lovers, provided they are not talked about by the fair damsels, to show you how condescending they were to take you. It is the first loves in the flesh that are so annoying to us.

A very slight thing is sufficient to cause a young and innocent girl to displace the ideal from her heart and enthrone the reality. A soft pressure of the hand, meaning nothing to him, but speaking volumes to her ; the amorous glance which beauty calls from us whether we will or not, that beauty receives with a palpitating heart ; but more, and worse than all the speeches of officious friends who tell her that such an one is deeply smitten with her, having all the time no further warrant for their speech than their own conjecture, and perchance the friendly expressed praises he has let fall, are sufficient to cause a girl to lose her heart, and it is lost indeed, when given unsought and unwished for.

Young men, you cannot be too careful. Mutual friends, you had better not "chaff" young men and maidens about each other.

Mildred had her ideal, and it was a very noble ideal. Yet, suddenly, she began to instal Harold in its place. He did not come up to her ideal; but whether it was the respect she felt for him, when she sat by his side behind the runaway ponies, and saw that he was really made of true metal, or his unusually tender mode of addressing her afterwards, which she had not resented, and his evident solicitude for her, or all combined, she began to think of him as something more than a friend.

No harm would have been done even now, had Harold never paid her any more attention. She would have been able, by the aid of pride, to have cast out all thought of him from her mind. But Harold Featherstonhaugh was one of those fellows who are always seeking to be on good terms with the other sex, who rapidly become familiar

with them, and whose consciences will admit of very close friendship with girls without thought of possible consequences. He became wiser afterwards, when it was too late.

So Harold, being thrown often into Mildred's way and liking her very much, became very friendly with her, and paid her great attention. He wrote an acrostic in her album, in which the letters forming the names of Mildred Brown were the commencement of very complimentary—not to say amatory, lines. These, dashed off easily by Harold, and meant as a compliment and nothing more, were taken by Mildred as a genuine expression of feeling. So it was in numberless little things, and as the weeks rolled by, sweet Mildred, who never did things by halves, fell honestly and truly in love with Featherstonhaugh, and imagined he was equally in love with her. He, how-

ever, had no idea of the state of her feelings, or to do him justice, he would have refrained from cultivating her friendship, from a desire to spare her pain.

By-and-by she heard rumours of Harold being seen walking with Jenny Llewellyn in the evenings. Hurt and annoyed at this, she yet had no right to demand an explanation. She felt so sure that Harold loved her best, that she was ready to forgive even his apparent unfaithfulness. Soon, however, an incident occurred which first opened her eyes to the bitter knowledge that she had loved in vain.

One Sunday evening, just after she had taken her seat in church, she saw Harold come in, accompanied by Jenny, and take his seat, not in his usual pew, where he had only one sitting, but in one in which they were placed by the verger, just before the

pew in which Mildred was. This she deemed sure evidence of his engagement to Jenny. Alas for Mildred ! compelled to bear, without showing sign that she suffered, the cruellest pain of all, she had sufficient self-control to answer Coralie calmly, when she afterwards reverted to the occurrence.

“Yes, I suppose he really is engaged to her as they say he is. I think it a pity, for he is a very nice fellow, and she, I should imagine, is scarcely suited to him.”

Coralie gazed at her inquisitively, half guessing how matters stood, for women’s eyes are sharp in love matters, but loving her sister, she forbore to talk any further about it. Mildred was grateful to her for her forbearance.

Now we will leave poor Mildred to herself. We will not dwell upon the sleepless nights, in which she tortured herself with

imaginings of Harold and Jenny together, the dull, hopeless days in which she strove to banish all thought of him, or the trial of his frequent presence. We will leave her to Time—the great healer.





CHAPTER IX.

JENNY had only just left the shop, which was being closed by the young men in coloured neckties, who looked a great deal too smart for the work of putting up the shutters, and had gone to her room to put on her things to go for a walk with Harold, when a note was brought to her from him. It told her of a circumstance which was trifling enough, except that it would stop all walks with Harold for a few days, but,

nevertheless, it was the beginning of what would become to her a serious matter.

The note ran thus :

“ Dear Jenny,

“ I am sorry I cannot keep my appointment with you to-night—indeed, I may not see you for several days—as I have by this afternoon’s post received a letter from Godfrey Evans, of whom you have heard me speak, to say that he is coming to see me by the eight o’clock train this evening, and proposes to stay with me for some time. I am sorry this will prevent my seeing so much of you as before, for a little time, but we must make up for it afterwards. With love.

“ Yours ever,

“ HAROLD.”

It was then half-past seven. Why should she not walk down to the station herself, as she wanted a walk, and see Harold there for a few moments. It never entered her head that Harold might object to this in any way. Indeed, she saw no reason why he should not introduce her to his friend. So she went.

Harold, being of that fidgetty nature which generally leads to over punctuality in keeping appointments, was at the station full quarter of an hour too early, and was pacing disconsolately up and down the platform. A railway-station is the most depressing place in the world to wait at. The cold wind sweeps along the platform, as if for the express discomfort of the passengers, the engine-drivers sound their whistles in the most ear-piercing manner, and the blacks

and smoke are unsightly and unsavoury.

Harold soon exhausted the amusements of the place, the gaudy pictures of watering-places and monster hotels, the black men trying to rub themselves white with patent towels, and the faded books on the book-stall. He was engaged in looking, with some degree of risibility, at a stern, stout, old gentleman in knee-breeches and silk stockings, evidently a church dignitary, who was pacing up and down the opposite platform, with the aid of a stick, which he thumped down with an authoritative air. The stick, however, frequently took it into its misguided head, to stick in the crevices between the planks of the platform, pulling up its owner, when it did so, with a most undignified jerk.

A neat, little, gloved hand was put

within Harold's arm, and a pleasant voice said,

"Look at that funny old gentleman!"

"Why, Jenny! what are you doing down here?"

"Aren't you glad to see me?" she asked, pouting.

"Why, yes, but I am engaged you know; and I don't like your walking about at night alone."

"It isn't far down here, Harold, and I can walk back with you and Mr. Evans."

Now this was what Harold wished to avoid. He knew he could not very well stand the questioning Godfrey would be sure to give him, so he said,

"We shall have so much to talk about, Jenny. You will have to walk back by yourself to-night, please, or stay, I will put you in a cab."

"No, thank you, Mr. Featherstonhaugh, I can walk," and she drew her hand from his arm and stood by his side in silence.

The train drew up, and Godfrey's dear old face appeared at the window.

"How are you, old fellow? what do you mean by coming and taking people by surprise in this manner, without even asking if they will have you?"

"How do, Harold? I'll unfold the why and wherefore when I have you alone to-night," said Godfrey, looking curiously at Jenny, who still stood by Harold.

"Good-night, Jenny," said the latter, and marched off arm in arm with his friend. Jenny feeling terribly hurt; as indeed she had good right to be, walked quickly home, and had the luxury of a good cry.

Harold felt that he had treated her rather badly, and was so vexed with himself, that he answered rather absently to several of Evans' questions, and flushed up rather hotly when that young man asked him who his companion was.

"A young lady I met with on the platform."

"Well, she's pretty. I hope you are not going to fall in love with anybody, or I shan't have much of your society."

"You, Godfrey! why what difference could it make to you?"

"Wait until after dinner, that is, if you are going to give me any, and then I will tell you all about it."

"About what? you mysterious old humbug. I have a good mind not to give you any dinner, until you tell me what you mean."

After dinner, Evans consented to explain his sudden visit.

"You know I leave college shortly, and I am offered the curacy of Falconebury Parva. It is not worth very much, but I thought I should be near you, and—

"Unfortunately you will not be near me," interrupted Harold. "I leave for London in a few days, and after I have passed my final, Lord only knows where I shall go to."

"Oh!" said Evans, looking rather blank ; "then I don't think I shall accept the offer. It is hardly good enough."

"Don't decide so hastily, Godfrey. Falconebury Parva is a very pleasant parish. The Browns, who are great friends of mine, live there. Wait until Saturday, and then come over with me and see them. Coralie

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and Mildred Brown are awfully pretty girls."

"I don't care for pretty girls. My books and a quiet walk fill up the measure of my enjoyments. I don't want any addition to them in the shape of flirting."

"A *quiet* walk! I suppose that does not mean kicking one's heels in a snowdrift?"

Both of them laughed at this allusion to their adventure on the mountains, and the talk branched off into other channels—such talk as old chums delight to indulge in, when brought together after an absence—reminiscences of fishing and birds'-nesting excursions, of well-remembered rambles over hill and dale, times and incidents which already seemed in the far past, few as were the years which had fled since.

In the spring time of life, each year is so full of incident, is so much enjoyed, and is

so full of resolve and promise, that even the year before is well-nigh forgotten, and forms part of a past rarely to be disturbed. The mind looks out so eagerly to the future, that it has little inclination or leisure to muse on the past. Even the present is looked upon as something to be hurried over, to reach that which is to come. How very different these feelings are to those of later years !

Saturday afternoon came, and saw Featherstonhaugh, Evans, and Brown at the Mount. Godfrey's one great fault was shyness ; but this soon wore off with the kindly welcome he obtained as Harold's friend, and before he had been there long, he felt thoroughly at ease.

The afternoon was cold, but fine and enjoyable. The prospect from the dining-room, window over the broad vale be-

neath them, with its green meadows and silvery streams and canals, was a pleasing one.

"There, Godfrey, you cannot match that scene for beauty, in the summer, by any of your boasted Welsh valleys."

"You are on the borders of Wales, remember," rejoined Godfrey, "and the beauty of this view is greatly added to by yonder hills, which are in Wales. Without the contrast they present to this smiling plain, the beauty before us would be tame indeed."

"True, but that is no defence of your Welsh valleys," said Coralie. "It is only in the summer and autumn that they have any beauty. At other seasons, there is too much coldness and gloom about them. One's eye becomes used to picturesqueness and grandeur and tires of it, but it is never tired of the

soft, sunshiny, pleasant beauty of our English vales and woods."

"I think," said Mildred, "we ought to measure the quality of the scenery by the effect it has upon us, or better, perhaps, by what it *produces*. For instance, Harold," she continued, gaily, "you, as a literary man, ought to know that the effect of such scenery as that before us, is to produce literature of the mild, pleasant, useless type; but that brought out by dwelling among the hills is the voice of liberty, of hope, of genuine and strong feeling. It has a more active purpose in its utterances than the other."

"Well said, Mildred," said her father.

Evans, who was rather at a loss how to answer Coralie's speech, deeming it of little use to enter into serious argument with a woman, looked gratefully and admiringly at

Mildred. It startled him out of his usual disbelief in a woman having such keen and deep perceptions as a man, and he said,

“I think you have put the matter in a somewhat new light, Miss Brown, but your argument only goes to prove that hill scenery is more valuable as a stimulant than the other, not that it is more beautiful. A man’s best thoughts occur to him when he is in his more serious moods, but that does not prove that such moods ought to prevail.”

“What, Mr. Evans, when I come to your aid, do you turn round and argue against me?” exclaimed Mildred, with mock amazement.

“No, no,” disclaimed Godfrey, eagerly, “only this is a matter that I have been thinking about lately — this influence of

scenery on character—and I should like to talk it over with you, as you seem—” and he hesitated, having got into a wood and not knowing how to get out of it, without paying Mildred the compliment he had almost let out, “that she seemed more intelligent than other girls.”

“Well, I never,” broke in Harold. “Fancy Godfrey, the woman-hater, expressing a wish to talk to a girl! What next?”

“Is Mr. Evans a woman-hater?” said Mr. Brown, who was standing near them, “then it is only because he has not had much experience of the sex, and has taken his ideas from his reading. Am I not right?”

“Possibly, Sir,” replied Godfrey, “I am not a ladies’ man like Feather, here.”

"Talking of scenery," said Mr. Brown, "have any of you young people ever been in the Fen country? I suppose not — unless Mr. Evans is a Cambridge man."

"No, I am dark blue."

"Well, that is a part of England without a single elevation higher than a bank by the side of a dyke, above the dead level. As far as the eye can see, there is nothing but level fields, waving reeds, straight dykes, a few poplars, and here and there a farmstead. Yet flat and monotonous as it is, there is a certain exhilarating sense of space and freedom, that makes the landscape anything but wearisome."

"The novelty of it may make it pleasing for a time," said Harold, "but dwellers among it must feel their lives a burden to

them. Give me the bonny West country. Can we not go for a walk?"

"Would you young men like to take the guns? The rabbits want thinning in the copse," said Mr. Brown.

Harold and young Brown jumped at the idea. Evans preferred going for a walk, and the girls took him off to show him the mere.

Harold had not seen Jenny since the night Godfrey came, and he felt that he had not behaved in a gentlemanly manner. Altogether, he felt very uncomfortable about her. He could not but see that she was very much in love with him, and he had made up his mind that he was *not* very much in love with her. He wished that he had never seen her, and would have been glad if she had declined to have anything further to do with him. There was not

much likelihood of her doing that, however, and he had not the heart to pain her by taking the initiative step.

How it would end he did not know, and he scarcely liked to think. Marriage was out of the question. He felt that he was getting into bad odour with his friends about the affair, and instead of accepting the punishment as a reward for his own acts, he was inclined to resent it, and justify himself against them. His thoughts were at this point, and Brown and he were picking their way over the brambles and dead leaves of the coppice, when the former, who had also been silent for a time, suddenly asked,

“When is it going to be?”

“When is what going to be?” said Harold, firing at a rabbit and missing it.

"Why the wedding with the 'fair Llewellyn,'" Brown answered, killing the rabbit which Harold had missed.

"About the same time that you pass your final examination," Harold answered shortly. Then sorry for having answered Brown so surlily, and perhaps hurt his feelings, he continued,

"I did not mean to say that, exactly, Brown, but you should not ask such stupid questions."

"You give occasion for them," said Brown.

After knocking over two or three rabbits they walked down towards the mere, along the narrow path. Coming from it, they saw Evans and Mildred in front, talking vivaciously, apparently on some interesting subject, and Coralie some little distance behind, there not being room for three abreast.

Harold thought, as he saw Evans' tall, stalwart figure bending over his companion, that they had become very intimate in a short time, and he regretfully felt that but for his own folly, he might have loved and been loved by her who, he could not but acknowledge, was a girl out of a thousand.

They all walked back together. Presently Coralie fell behind with Godfrey, and said :

"Mr. Evans, you are a very dear friend of Harold's, are you not?"

"Yes, we are very fond of each other, I think. He is a very noble fellow."

"We all like him very much, and because we like him so much, we are sorry to see him throwing himself away as he does," and she told Evans about Jenny

Llewellyn. She went on, "Can you, as a friend, speak to him? Do you not think he would mind you? I am sure you may be able to prevent suffering both to himself and the girl."

"But why shouldn't he marry her?" said simple-minded Godfrey.

"Oh! I am afraid I have not made you understand me. I don't think he wishes to marry her—or if he does, I know that it will not be a happy union for him. Pray do not misconstrue my motive, Mr. Evans."

Coralie persuaded herself that her only motive was the desire for Harold's good. She did not care to own to herself how much she wished to rescue Harold from the fascinations of her sister's rival, nor the hope that Harold would ultimately see her sister's worth; but the fact was, that for no other consideration would Coralie have

sought Godfrey's aid and interference in the way she did.

"I assure you, Miss Coralie, that I do not do you that injustice," Evans replied, "but before I can say anything to Harold, I must learn something more about it, because now he will know that I could only have heard of it from your family, and he is rather touchy upon some matters. He may take it into his head to be vexed with you."

"True, I had forgotten that. I trust to you not to mention what I have told you to anyone."

"You may depend upon me, Miss Coralie."

Although Evans did not attach much importance to this at the time, it opened his eyes a little, and caused him to keep a watch upon Harold, whom he loved like a brother,

or more, perhaps ; for the love of brothers is not, as a rule, very deep, while the love of two youthful friends is oftentimes as deep as the love of husband and wife.

Mildred had been pleased with Godfrey, and he with her. In the drawing-room, after dinner, she found herself making comparisons between him and Harold, which were not quite favourable to the latter. They stood side-by-side at a table with their backs turned to her. From their feet to their shoulders they were exactly alike, both tall, straight and well-built, with the same square, manly shoulders, but the heads were so different. Harold's, with its mass of brown curls was, perhaps, the handsomer ; but Godfrey's, with its stiff, black hair and tall, upright forehead seemed to belong to the better man. She noted the attitude of the two. Godfrey's arm was thrown over

Harold's shoulder in a half-protecting, half-caressing manner, Harold's hand was lifted up and clasping Godfrey's, as if accepting the caress and the protection.

When they turned round, the contrast was still more marked. Harold was unmistakeably young and thoughtless. Evans, though so young, looked earnest, thoughtful, and reliable. If Coralie had known what was passing in her sister's mind, she would not have felt so unhappy about her.

As Harold and Godfrey drove home, the latter announced his intention of accepting the curacy.

Harold laughed and said.

"You must get Mildred to help you with the parish work, Godfrey."



CHAPTER X.

IT is the usual thing for embryo lawyers to spend the last year of their articles in London, with the London solicitor, who acts as agent to the country attorney, all country attorneys being bound to have such an agent in London. During this last year, the articulated clerk is supposed to gain an insight into the practical part of his business as carried on in the metropolis. He has to attend at judges' chambers, and at the various

public offices, and to employ his spare time in reading up for the dreaded ordeal of the final examination.

Too few, however, honestly work during this last year. To many it is the first release from home life; the unusual sense of liberty and the facilities for enjoyment which offer themselves on all sides, render this time, which ought to be the most valuable for work and future advantage, in effect nothing but a holiday, until the imminence of the examination drives articulus to a month or two's frantic and ill-regulated study, injurious alike to health and the retention of that which has been so hastily crammed in.

Harold went up to Messrs. Ferrett & Seal, the agents of Mr. Ransom, for four or five months only, having read with sufficient steadiness during his articles, to feel sure of a pass. Brown, who was going up for ex-

amination at the same time as Harold, stayed in the country and read more quietly, but with far greater assiduity than his friend. Having a very retentive memory, his reading was of greater value to him than the same amount would be to Harold, whose memory was only of the ordinary calibre.

Of Harold's stay in London I do not propose to say much. He worked well at the office all the morning, and in the afternoon and evening, he would go to the Library of the Law Institution in Chancery Lane, and in company with some thirty others who had gained admittance to its privileges, read and take notes with great perseverance, but varying results.

The library was a long, lofty room, with two wings and a fireplace at each end. The centre and one wing were used by the

students, and were furnished with long tables, on which were comfortable reading easels. The most perfect quiet reigned, and a more favourable place for study can scarcely be imagined. Studying in company is, I think, easier than studying alone. The sight of a number of pale faces steadily bent over their books, and intently engrossed in mastering their contents, is rather impressive, and acts as a goad to the wavering or tired mind, urging it to more sustained effort, in order to keep pace with those around, whom one imagines from their demeanour to be more successfully studying than oneself. Then if you want a rest, you can look up and watch the various faces and forms about you, speculating as to their circumstances and deriving amusement from their peculiarities. This was a favourite relaxation of Harold's.

There was the tall, thin, pale-faced fellow, who as a rule sat next to Harold. He was indeed an enthusiastic student. He seemed to read with lightning rapidity, he took voluminous notes on narrow strips of paper, which he drew out of his pocket and conned over at odd intervals in an omnibus or railway carriage. He was trying hard for the Clifford's Inn prize, the highest of those obtainable at any examination in law, and in a subsequent examination he took it.

There, on the opposite side of the room, was merry, fat, little, Dalton who had a habit of reading and repeating half aloud like a school-boy; and an even more irritating habit, namely, that of resting one leg on the toe only, and then rapidly shaking it up and down, of course, imparting a tremulous motion to the table, disturb-

time the slow and somewhat deaf librarian had turned around, and adjusted his spectacles, to find out the cause of the slight disturbance, everyone was hard at work and quite innocent of anything having happened. This dodge, often repeated, caused quite a change in the aspect of the room by the evening, and had to be repeated every day, the tables being afterwards moved back to their original positions by the attendants.

Sometimes too, some stranger would come in, in search of a friend, and at the sound of his footsteps up the room, everyone would look up, until the intruder, quite ashamed of himself, would sink into the nearest vacant chair, and look helplessly around, or beat a hasty retreat. The *habitués* of the room soon acquired the habit of moving noiselessly about. At times, too, an epidemic of practical joking would set in, and

going. The tables were placed at such a distance from the fire, as to make the young men imagine they were not warm enough. They were not then allowed to stand before the fire, as was formerly the case, when the warmth was completely shut in from those at the tables by a fringe of young men, with their coat-tails parted with one hand and a book in the other. Recourse was therefore had to a plan of bringing the tables nearer to the fire without discovery by the librarian, who sat at his desk in the warmest corner.

The floor is smoothly carpeted with felt, and both chairs and tables have castors on their legs. The men on the side of a table nearest to the fire would back their chairs noiselessly for a couple of feet. Those on the opposite side would then unanimously push the large table a corresponding distance, and draw their chairs after it, and by the

"Why, Abel, of course." One of the most successful of these catch questions was, "Ought a man to marry his *widow's* sister? Give your reasons pro or con." This excited considerable discussion, it being taken at the first glance to mean, "Ought he to marry his deceased wife's sister?" Another was, "What remedy have you against a tenant for *life* holding over after the expiration of his tenancy?"

This elicited the answers, "By distress." "Make him pay double rent," and so on, the joke being that the tenancy could not expire until the tenant was *dead*, when of course he could not "hold over," or in other words, remain in possession.

On the morning of the examination, Harold, accompanied by Brown, lounged into the library to comfort himself by chatting over the approaching ordeal with

several fellows, who had gathered there, rules being disregarded at a time like this. They stood around the fireplace in various stages of trepidation.

"I couldn't sleep last night, I was in such a funk," said Dalton.

"They say the questions are all practical ones. If they are, I shall be spun," (plucked) said another.

"Are they? Then I shan't go in. Good bye, you fellows," said Poole, making a bolt of it.

It was close upon ten o'clock, so they made for the examination room, which had small desks just large enough for one, and numbered, in rows, down the room. A seat was allotted to each man, and they took their places. The waiting, while the examination papers were brought round, was the most nervous time of all. Harold watched

the faces of those who had already received the papers, some looked the very image of despair, others were even then at work, with relieved countenances. At last Harold's turn came. A hasty glance at the paper sufficed to show him that he was safe, and he set to work.

After a time, he gained confidence enough to look about him. It was an interesting sight. The majority of those present were of course young men, but here and there were middle aged men, and two white-headed old men, one at least over seventy years of age. He wondered what motive induced them to enter the lists. Could it be simply the ambition to hold the legal title of "gentleman," before they died, or what? He gave up the problem and watched the others. Some were writing quickly and unhesitatingly, others were

gnawing their pens and looking puzzled, and others, I am sorry to say, were craning their necks to get a glimpse of what their next neighbours had written ; in vulgar language, they were trying to get a crib.

Harold soon finished his paper. The questions were theoretical ones, and better suited to Brown than to Harold, who had mainly given his attention to the practical details of his business. Had the examination been a practical one, as it often is, Brown might not have passed. As it was, he did better than Harold.

The next day's proceedings were much the same, and Harold felt sure he had passed. He wrote home, and to Jenny, and then went strongly in for amusement for a few days. After the welcome notification came that he had passed, he had to

undergo the ceremony of being admitted "an Attorney of Her Majesty's Courts of Common Pleas, Queen's Bench, and Exchequer, and a Solicitor in the High Court of Chancery," during which proceeding he had to disburse some six-and-thirty pounds in hard cash. Then he had to obtain his certificate to practise, which cost him another three pounds, and then he might consider himself as fully fledged.

Then came the "Honours" list. At every examination there are two or three prizes of books given, and half a dozen certificates of merit. Harold had not worked for honours, as he considered them, as indeed they are, practically, a useless acquisition, therefore he was not surprised at not seeing his own name on the list; but he was considerably astonished to find that he had been outstripped by Brown, who, to the

great delight of his sisters, had obtained a certificate of merit. Harold could not help feeling that he was a little like the hare, in the fable of the hare and the tortoise, but he was thoroughly good-natured, and therefore rejoiced at his friend's unexpected success.

Just before Harold left London, he received the following letter from Godfrey Evans, who had been duly installed curate of Falconebury Parva.

“Dear old man,

“I was glad to hear that you have passed. I suppose we shall see you down here soon. Will you forgive me, if I test our friendship by seeking to give you some advice upon a matter, with which only my regard for you could induce me to interfere. It is this. Mixing with your friends here, I have heard

of your friendship (shall I call it such?) with one Jenny. Now let me ask you one or two plain questions. Are you *in love* with her? (You know what I mean). If so, are you prepared to marry her? If not, what do you mean to do? Harold, old fellow, your reputation is as dear to me as my own, and I cannot bear to hear the allusions to the connection between you and Jenny, which I constantly do hear. I need not tell you what is right to be done. You know that as well as I do. I only advise you to *think*. Let me hear from you that I have not offended you, and believe me ever to be

“Your sincere and attached friend,

“GODFREY.

“P.S. I have seen the young lady, she is looking pale and careworn for so young a girl.”

Which letter disturbed Harold mightily, and set him thinking more than ever. He wrote back.

“You have not offended me, for I know and appreciate your motive. Whether I love Jenny, or not, I don’t think I shall love anybody as I love *you*, old chap. I promise to *think*, but I am in a difficult position. Let me alone, and do not allude to the subject again. I dare say all will come right. I shall see you in a day or two.”

Godfrey’s postscript made him so anxious, however, that the first person he went to see when he went back was Jenny.



CHAPTER XI.

THE setting out in life is, with young men in the position of our hero, an anxious and uncomfortable time. Not to weary my readers with an account of the various letters and negotiations which occupied many weary weeks, Harold at length purchased the office furniture, papers, and goodwill of a solicitor, recently deceased, at the large and busy town of Portwich, situated at the mouth of the river on the

banks of which lay Falconebury, and about forty miles from the latter place. Here, with a small allowance from his father, he intended to set up and make his way in the world as well as he could. Brown remained at Mr. Ransom's office as a clerk, with a view of afterwards purchasing a partnership.

The time was drawing near for Harold's departure. Six o'clock one evening saw him walking by the river side, pacing slowly up and down beneath a row of elm trees that shaded the path, and made it delightfully cool. It was a pleasant summer evening—the close of a charming day. The river flowed slowly and quietly along, with only a just audible murmur of its eddies, under the overhanging bushes, that formed a graceful emerald fringe to its dark, clear waters. Overhead, the full

foliated branches rustled in the light breeze with a happy, busy sound, the bees boomed by with their usual air of importance, the gnats danced in the sunlight in a golden cloud, iridescent beetles in gleaming crowds darted to and fro over the smooth water, in such a rapid mixture and interweaving of individualities, that no eye could follow them, unless the eye of a lazy fish, basking under the willows. The king-fisher darted up stream, flashing like a meteor, in his glory of orange and blue; the thrush sang on the topmost branches of a poplar, and from the grove on the hill came the low, sweet, single note of the nightingale, which gave notice that by-and-by the soft June twilight would be filled by the fullness and melody of the sweetest and tenderest song, that ever came from the downy throats of the tenants of the wood, the

dear little birdies, who do so much to please us men by their songs and their beauty, and whose innocent attractiveness is only repaid by man's cruelty of death and captivity.

Yet all these sights and sounds, keenly as he was wont to enjoy them, now fell unheeded upon Harold's ear. He saw not, or seeing, noticed not, the numerous pleasure boats, needle-like skiffs, and dashing eight oars which swept up and down the stream. He noticed not the numbers of people who passed him on this, the favourite summer promenade of the citizens, although he was well acquainted with many of them. With his hands clasped behind him, and his head hung forward, he paced slowly along, his knitted brow and compressed lips indicating that his thoughts were not pleasant ones.

He was waiting for Jenny, who had asked him to take her for a row down the river, and who was exercising her lady's privilege of keeping him waiting.

His thoughts were not pleasant ones. Godfrey's letter had had no slight effect upon him. He had decided what his feelings were towards Jenny. He was smitten with her beauty, and felt pleasure in her company; but he did not love her as he felt he could love. He did not love her well enough to be his wife. But how could he tell her this? He knew that the connection between them, this foolish semi-engagement must be dissolved, but how? How could he bring himself to inflict so much pain upon her? If she had been his equal, if she had been capable of making him such a wife as was necessary to him in his upward progress, one who

would be a help and not a hindrance—one who could take her own position in the world, one whom he would, at least, feel satisfied at seeing at the head of the table, around which his friends were gathered, then there would be a way, although not an easy or pleasant one, out of the difficulty. Even though he did not love her, he would marry her rather than tell her he did not love her. Her path, at least, should be made as pleasant and happy as he could make it.

With Jenny, however, there was nothing to be done, but to inflict the pain, and that at once, this very evening. He could only hope that she had not learned to care for him as much as he feared she had. He might, perhaps, be only raising imaginary difficulties as he was often in the habit of doing, and—

"Why, Harold, how serious you look," and there was Jenny, looking lovelier than ever, in a large straw hat, and light coloured summer dress of some soft and pretty material.

"Oh, how do you do, Jenny; you must have come up as softly as a water-sprite, are you sure you are not one?"

"Do I *feel* like one," replied she, taking his arm and leaning upon it, pressing it to her soft, warm bosom.

"You look more charming than ever," said he, gazing at her approvingly. Oh, Harold, can you not shut your eyes to her beauty?

"Thank you, Mr. Featherstonhaugh, allow me to make you my best curtsy."

They looked anything but an unhappy couple, as they walked arm in arm to

the place where the boats were kept.

"Ah! how do, Snelling?" said Harold carelessly, to a man who stepped out of the ferry boat in front of them.

"Oh, how I do hate that man," said Jenny.

"So do I," replied Harold, as they took their seats in the light, swift boat which he had chosen. He took off his coat and seized the sculls, while Jenny lay back on the crimson cushions and took hold of the tiller ropes. A few long, powerful strokes took them past the boat-houses, and Harold leaning forward on his oars asked. "Why do you hate Snelling, Jenny?"

"Oh because"—and she hesitated with a pretty blush spreading over her face.

"Why, Jenny?" repeated Harold.

"Because he is in love with me, at least, he says so."

"Damn his impudence."

"Hush, Bachcen drwg," (Celtic for 'naughty boy') said Jenny, laying a delicate little hand over his mouth. "I never heard you swear before, and it is very wrong *and rude.*"

"I beg your pardon, Jenny dear, but to think of the cheek of the fellow. How do you know he is in love with you?"

"Because he says so."

"Yes, but how does he say so. Does he go for walks with you?" said Harold, forgetting everything in his jealousy of anyone else presuming to love Jenny until he had quite done with her.

"You unkind fellow," said Jenny pouting as she spoke. "Do you think I should go for walks with anyone but you?"

"Well then, what does he do?"

"He has written several letters to me, and he wants me to marry him. I returned his last letter without opening it," answered Jenny, driven at last to be explicit.

"Quite right, Jenny, I am glad you did so. Shall I give the fellow a licking?"

"Oh, no, please don't do that. He would have the law of you, or something. I don't think he will bother me again."

"Let me know if he does. He is such a mean blackguard. If he were a nice honest fellow, I should not mind his falling in love with you—and you with him," Harold added, remembering what he had to tell her that evening, and stealing a look at her to see how she would take his speech. She, however, took it as a joke, and laughed merrily.

Jenny had neglected her steering during this colloquy, and they came into collision with a four oar coming up stream, the young men in which used some not very choice language to Harold and Jenny. As they were getting clear of each other, Harold giving his oar a sudden lift, knocked the rudder of the four oar away from its fastenings, and telling them it was a lesson for speaking rudely to a lady, he pulled briskly away, leaving them somewhat in the position of a fish without its fins.

They 'shot' the ford by the Welsh bridge, and Harold pulled gently down the stream, past fragrant hayfields and groves resonant with the warblings of many a feathered songster, past flowered banks and shallow fords, where the red and white cattle stood up to their bellies in the water, and lazily

whisked the flies away from their smooth sides, until he reached the spot they intended to make the limit of their journey, and where they intended to rest for an hour.

It was near what was known on the river as an eel-bay, a contrivance for catching eels which once upon a time was in full work at certain seasons of the year, when the eels made their annual migration down the river. A weir, or fence, of stakes and brushwood with a foundation of stones, stretched from one bank of the river in a diagonal direction up the stream to within a few feet of the opposite bank. At the lower end of this weir was an opening, across which were suspended the eel nets. Above the weir was a little island with one solitary willow upon it, shading a soft, green bank

near to which they moored their boat and landed.

Here Jenny and Harold had often been before, and she had sat and busied herself with some feminine work, while he read to her his favourite poems, or perhaps one of his own composition. He used to read her a poem or article as though written by someone else, and then, if she praised it, he would confess himself the author, and be more than pleased at the approbation of her untutored judgment. He had brought a book with him now, and she had brought some pretty little bit of fancy work, to which she said she had to put some finishing touches. She sat down in her usual place, and he lay at her feet, supporting himself on his elbow and idly turning over the pages of his book. He,

knowing what he had to say, dared not look at her.

"How serious you are to-night, Harold. Is anything the matter with you?"

"No. I am rather tired, that's all."

"Ah, you worked too hard reading for your examination. I am so glad it is over. It seemed so long for you to be away from me, and you didn't write to me very often. I suppose you hadn't time."

"I was very busy," said Harold, moodily.

"Yes, I thought you were ; but I knew you thought of me, so I didn't mind, and I thought of you and counted the days until you came back. Oh ! what was that ?" as a splash in the water close by them startled her. It was a pike foraging for his supper, and the small fry leaped out of the water as he pursued them over the shallows.

In Harold's then humour, he smiled grimly as he thought that the drama being acted on the bank was not unlike that in the water. He was the pike and Jenny his victim.

"How quiet you are, Harold, aren't you going to read to me?" said Jenny, passing her fingers caressingly through his long, soft, brown hair, that gleamed with a metallic lustre as the western sun shone through the loose curls.

He took up his book and read something to her almost mechanically, scarcely understanding what he read. Then he shut the book and was silent. The water rippled musically over the weir, the cattle lowed from the farm-yard, the swallows skimmed the surface of the river and dipped joyously in it, and all was peace save in his heart.

"Your friend, Mr. Evans, was in the shop once while you were away, Harold, with the Miss Browns. He seems to be sweet on the eldest one."

"He couldn't do better," said Harold absently.

"I don't think he likes me. He stared at me quite rudely, and looked so queer."

"He is a nice fellow, though."

"I daresay, but he needn't have looked at me as if I were a show."

"He doesn't often see pretty girls, Jenny."

"Oh, nonsense."

Then presently she laid down her work, which was finished, and said—

"When are you going to leave Falconbury, Harold? You have not told me all about it yet."

He told her where he was going and when, and added, with a sudden effort to break the ice,

"And then we shan't see each other any more, Jenny."

"Not see each other any more, Harold! What do you mean?"

"Why, of course we *may* meet again. People drop across each other in all sorts of places, you know; but it is not likely, as I shall spend the rest of my life at Portwich, and you here, or goodness knows where."

"Now, Harold, I am sure you are vexed with me," said Jenny, with a little sob, and raising his head with her two hands to look at his eyes, and, if possible, see in their expressive depths what he meant, an examination he steadfastly avoided. "I thought you were angry with me for

something. What is it that I have done? I am so sorry, do tell me, Harold."

"You have not vexed me. You are a very good little girl. It is myself that I am vexed at, for I am afraid I have treated you badly, Jenny. We have had many pleasant hours together, but this must be the last. We ought never to see each other again."

Jenny, still thinking that he must be vexed with her, although she could not imagine for what, fell forward upon his breast and began to sob and cry. He, raising himself a little, put his arms around her to support her, and endeavoured to soothe her by caresses, and even kissed her forehead. As she hid her face on his breast, her whole body shaking with the violence of her sobbing, for she was an excitable little thing, Harold felt most

bitterly what an ungentlemanly scoundrel he had been to entrap and play with her affections. He was distressed beyond measure at what he had done, and would have paid almost any price to undo it, but there was no turning back now.

"Hush, Jenny, dear, do be quiet. I don't want to pain you, Jenny, I would cut off my right hand to save you pain if that would do it."

"Then why did you speak so cru—cruelly to me!" she gasped.

"I must speak the truth," he replied, sadly.

"Won't you write to me? Won't you come and see me sometimes? Won't you, when you have got on in business—won't you marry me? I love you so, and I will wait for you so long, if you wish. I am not afraid of waiting. Don't you love me,

Harold, like you used to do?" she cried, looking up at him through her tears. He was unable for a time to reply, and he got up and walked to the other end of the islet and then back again to where she was. She too had risen and stood with her hands clasped in front of her, looking appealingly at him.

He folded his arms and leaned against the tree, wishing all the while that the black water, that looked so deep and still under yonder willows in the summer gloaming, flowed over his body, and that he had not lived to inflict this pain on her. He dared not tell her he did not love her. He preferred that she should think him actuated by worldly prudence and selfishness, rather than that he had wantonly trifled with her heart—so he said, crushing back the feelings which

almost overcame him, although he could not repress the tear in his eye.

“Jenny, it is useless to deceive either you or myself. Our positions are so different that I cannot, I dare not, marry you. I had no idea that things had gone so far with you. God knows I never intended to harm you in any way, but I have done very wrong in acting towards you as I have done. I have had so much pleasure in your society, that I have not been careful enough to prevent going too far. I know you think me harsh and cruel to speak to you as I do, and I deserve all your reproaches. Jenny, you must forget me. You will find some one else who will love you better, and behave better to you than I do. I don’t ask you to forgive me now—I cannot forgive myself. Let me finish,

Jenny. I know this is hard upon you, but believe me, it is best that I should speak to you like this."

He ceased speaking, and leaning his head against the tree, that he might not see her horror-struck face, out of which all the colour had fled, and the piteous look in her eyes, he pressed his forehead hard against the knotted bark, as if by force of physical pain to drive out the mental disturbance within. Jenny stood for a time without saying a word, scarcely realizing what it was that she had heard. It was too great a shock to be fully felt at first. Was this the end of all her hopings and longings? Was this the issue of the love she had lavished upon him? It seemed to check the course of the blood in her veins, to paralyse her faculties—but it *could* not be true. There

must be some terrible mistake. Were all her hopes of happiness, so often dwelt upon, to be blasted like this? No, she would not believe it. She fell upon her knees before him, and said, with an eloquence born of the necessity of the moment.

“Harold, do you know what you have done, if you do not love me—ah! I know you do not love me, or you would not mind the slight difference between your position and mine. Why am I not worthy to be your wife? You yourself have said that I am beautiful. If I have not learning enough, I can try and learn, and you can teach me. I will be so patient and good, and try so hard to be worthy of you. Harold, darling, do you know that you are breaking my heart; I am not a flirt like your English girls. I know my love is worth

having, Harold. Oh, that I should have to sue in this unmaidenly way!" and she burst afresh into a torrent of tears, and passionate, racking sobs.

Harold raised her up, and held her in his arms again. His heart was touched, as whose would not have been. She looked more lovely than ever, and she was so helpless, and loved him so much. The devil tempted him. He thought of the loneliness of his coming bachelor life at Portwich; the vision of a quiet, snug little cottage in a suburb, and a loving figure to welcome him when he chose to pay it a visit. The devil had his way. He said hoarsely, and in a voice that seemed to him to be that of someone else inside him, while the blood rushed hotly to his head and made him giddy, and

the trees and river to whirl around him.

"Would you like to live with me, Jenny?"

She looked up with returning hope.

"Ah, would I not, you know I would!"

"But *not as my wife*, Jenny?"

She understood him. She drew back, and gazed at him with a fury of indignation, her tiny hands clenched, and her head thrown back, with an expression of scorn on her face, that Harold remembered ever after. Then the expression of wrath died away, and one of unutterable sadness took its place. She simply said,

"May God forgive you, Harold! Take me home."

With his head bent down in abject shame, but with a feeling of intense relief that she

had not accepted his wild and dishonourable proposal, he stepped into the boat, followed by her. Without a word passing between them, he rowed home against the stream, pulling desperately hard and quick. Jenny sat in the stern sheets, with a white, rigid face, and, for the greater part of the way, with tightly closed eyes.

Oh, her bitter downfall !

When they landed, Harold walked by her side to see her safe home ; still no word had passed between them. In the city, they again met Snelling. He really was in love with Jenny, and would have been glad to have made her his wife. It was still light enough for him to see the faces of these two, and he was struck by the expression on each of them. He saw it was no ordinary quarrel, and as he phrased it "putting two and two together," by the light of his own

ideas, and his conception of what was likely to happen when a gentleman was intimate with a milliner's apprentice, he muttered to himself. "Ah, my proud hussy, you're no wife for an honest man now," and hatred towards those two sprung up within his heart, and if anything could be done to injure either of them, he would do it.

They reached Mrs. Danby's at last. Harold held out his hand. Jenny took it, and with her left hand drawing out of her pocket the piece of work she had been engaged upon, and giving it to him, said,

"I had worked this watch-pocket for you. Will you take it now as some remembrance of me. Good bye—for ever."

He stooped down and kissed her hand—so they parted.



CHAPTER XII.

IT was perhaps not a very wise step of Harold's to start in business for himself at once. His youth and inexperience were sure to tell sadly against him. He found that he could only retain comparatively few of his predecessor's clients. Still he was young and sanguine, and determined to succeed, so he set to work patiently and hopefully to await the coming of business. In the meantime, and to pre-

vent the time being heavy on his hands, he took up his half finished novel and completed it. He had wisely given up his intention of forsaking the law, and taking solely to literature; but literature was still an amusement and a solace, and might also be profitable, and help him materially along the road of life, where the turnpike gates are so frequent that the hand is continually in the pocket searching for money to pay the tolls.

The novel was finished and sent up. It was accepted, and an arrangement made by which the publishers took all risk and gave him thirty-five per cent of the profits, instead of a lump sum down. Satisfied with this, Harold waited for the proofs. Week after week went by, and they came not. He got unsatisfactory replies to his letters, and

at last—well the issue of it shall be told in its proper place in our story.

Harold had not been long settled in his offices, when he suffered from a custom which is an exceeding nuisance to a young professional man. One afternoon he was sitting at his desk writing. He had finished all the office work he could find to do for that day, and was writing away at his novel. His blotting pad lay open and a foolscap sheet which he was rapidly covering with his awfully bad writing was within it. A large abstract lay close by his left hand. Hearing the door of the clerk's office open, he shut his blotting-pad, and drawing the abstract over it, was deeply engaged in perusing its closely written sheets, making notes on the margin thereof with a pencil. This justifiable piece of dissimula-

tion was for the benefit of any client who might come in, and who would go away with a bad impression if he found his legal adviser idle, or not employed in office work.

His office boy opened his door, and announced Mrs. Norton. Harold rose and received a very pretty and ladylike woman. He handed her a chair, and wondered what her business could be. It was soon explained. She was collecting subscriptions for a charitable purpose connected with his parish. Harold was, unfortunately for him, not the one to say "no" to a pretty woman, so partly because he did not like to refuse, and partly because the object for which his subscription was required, was in itself a laudable one, he gave her a guinea with which she departed very well satisfied. Harold sup-

posed that in the ordinary course of events he was not likely to have another begging visitant shortly, and I need scarcely say that he sincerely hoped not. To a young man just commencing life, whose outgoings in all probability exceed his incomings, this giving of subscriptions is a serious matter. It is of importance to him to succeed socially as a means of ultimate pecuniary profit, and how can he hope to succeed socially if he is known to be stingy in almsgiving.

In a small town everybody knows, or supposes he knows, what his neighbour ought to do, and he at least expects his neighbour to subscribe to the fund which he himself is interested in raising. Harold was so situated just then, that the loss of a guinea was an appreciable matter if he wished to keep out of debt. He had wisely started

on the principle of paying ready money for what he bought, and the guinea he had given, left him with just insufficient to buy himself a new suit of clothes, if he followed out his plan of "paying on the nail."

It was therefore with anything but pleasure, that, an hour afterwards, he received another visitor who, it was easy to see, had come upon a like mission. He was clothed in black, and his white necktie showed his profession. In appearance, he looked like one of those singularly unpleasant people, *rabid* dissenters. (I do not, by this expression, mean any disrespect to the highly influential and intelligent class of men who form the higher portions of the dissenting class, but they themselves must admit that they have numbers of men in their

body, who do their sect incalculable harm by their intemperate zeal.)

The man who now stood in Harold's office was a Primitive Methodist preacher, and he had called to solicit a gift towards the extension of some schools belonging to his denomination, situate quite at the other extremity of Portwich. Harold said that he did not see why he should be called upon to part with his hard-earned cash for such a purpose, whereupon his visitor let loose upon him a torrent of eloquence, which was decidedly not of the most persuasive character.

He told Harold that his duty was to give unto the Lord (in the shape of his schools) up to a tenth part of his substance—that, if he did not do his duty, he would be taught it by some severe affliction.

“Ain't the Lord prospered you?” he

asked, "and can't you give even as He has prospered you?"

"No, He hasn't prospered me yet," said Featherstonhaugh. "I have just given more than I can afford to a church Dorcas society." The unlucky mention of the word "church" was the signal for an onslaught against that "antiquated and corrupt" institution. At last, to cut him short, Harold made a proposition.

"Look here, Sir," he said, "I am willing to help you as much as I can, and I have thought of a way of doing it. If I give you a guinea now, that would be all you would get out of me for a long time. Now, if I enable you to save a good many guineas, that will be the best for you, won't it?"

The Reverend gentleman assented.

"Then I think I can help you materially. You are continually requiring trust deeds and conveyances drawn, and your members cannot very well afford to pay for them. Now if you will bring them to me, I will do them at half the usual charges and so save you a tidy sum each year, which will represent my subscription."

His hearer was delighted with this offer, (it would pay Harold very well, as the cunning fellow knew) and took his departure. The offer was made known to the denomination, and Harold received a vote of thanks at the annual conference, and *kudos* into the bargain.

Work as hard as he could, he could not help feeling unhappy about Jenny. He worked up his own sensitive feelings, until he at times succeeded in making himself

perfectly miserable. With his vivid imagination, he would place himself exactly in her position, and depict to himself the agonies and regrets of outraged love, and then he goaded himself with the knowledge that he was the cause of this suffering in another.

He had not yet made any congenial acquaintances, in whose society he might forget his annoyances, and the lonely life that he was leading was made none the happier by his thoughts of Jenny. He had heard nothing from her, or of her, and in his letters to Falconebury friends he studiously avoided all mention of her name. They, on the other hand, said nothing of her, from a desire not to annoy him by recalling to his recollection facts and follies, which they thought he would rather forget. So that up to a late period he was kept in ignorance

of events that were occurring at Falconbury.

Many people praise the life of a bachelor's in lodgings. They extol its freedom—the *abandon* and peculiar luxuries that a man, who is troubled with a wife intolerant of untidiness and tobacco smoke, must forego. Well, it has its charms, and to men of a certain temperament, they are powerful. To men, however, of Harold's disposition it is most irksome.

He was intensely fond of children, and of course their presence seldom brightened his rooms. He liked intelligent and pleasant company, and he disliked frequenting bar-rooms and billiard-rooms. So he was very lonely, and sometimes the sense of loneliness brought with it the sense of being friendless, though few men had warmer or

more steadfast friends. As the Indians say, "his heart was big," and having nothing to give its surplus energies to, it brooded within itself. He used to think that what he really wanted, was a good, pure, and affectionate girl to love and be loved by. Perhaps he was not far wrong. People like him are unhappy unless they have some one to love.

On Sundays he attended his parish church with commendable regularity. At first, the sermons he heard there pleased him singularly. They were delivered by a clergyman who was a decided "character." He read the lessons, prayers, and psalms as if he were conversing with you, and with the most exaggerated inflections of voice, according as he wished to express the wonder, praise, or exhortation conveyed in the

sentence he was reading. His sermons were so racy and peculiar, and he said such sarcastic and striking things, that the only productions they could be compared to, were the social articles in the *Saturday Review*.

Harold got rather tired of them at last, and went on a pilgrimage among the thirty churches of which Portwich boasted, hoping to find a good preacher. In this search he was not very successful. The number of small parishes into which the city was divided, and the consequent number of churches made each living very poor, and naturally attracted but fourth rate talent. One Sunday evening Harold found his way into St. Michael's, and was shown into a pew in which were already seated several other persons. The church was pewed in the old fashioned style, large square pews with seats

all around, so that the occupants faced each other, and with straight, high backs and narrow seats. The altar piece was a well painted oil picture, representing the Ascension. The high oak pulpit was reached by a wide spiral staircase, winding completely round the pillar at the back, and the clerk's desk was itself as high as an ordinary pulpit.

About the edifice were erected iron up-rights, having brass shields affixed to them, each shield bearing the name of some worthy parishioner who had been Mayor of the city, and the date of his Mayoralty, extending back for, in some instances, one hundred and fifty and two hundred years. The whitewashed walls were covered with brasses and monuments, and a fretted oaken roof of great beauty stretched overhead. When Harold went in, the service had not com-

menced, but the church was well filled with a respectable congregation. When they stood up at the commencement of the service, Harold withdrew his attention from the architecture of the church to its occupants, but speedily all his attention was rivetted by the young lady who sat on the opposite side of the pew he was in.

I do not exactly believe in love at first sight, but I believe that love more generally is commenced by a sudden, favourable impression received at first sight, than slowly and gradually drifted into through companionship.

Well, Harold was very much impressed by what he saw. She was a tall, rather too tall some people might say, but not too tall for Harold's six feet of slimness, and a well, though simply, dressed young lady, apparently about nineteen or twenty years

of age. She had a small, well-shaped head, brown hair, well-complexioned cheeks, nose rather "tiptilted," but decidedly pretty, a sweet mouth, with red ripe lips, the upper one rather short, and eyes—well, when shaded by their long lashes, they looked deeply and beautifully black, in a side light they appeared to be hazel ; but when they looked at you, they were of a soft, tender, yet sparkling brown, of the same colour as her hair. Their size and beauty made a face, which would otherwise be but passable, positively lovely, not handsome, but something much sweeter. The long, thin hands and feet, which latter Harold saw as she placed them on a footstool, were in proportion to her tall and slender figure, and were not otherwise remarkable.

What attracted Harold most of all was

the air of refinement and breeding which she wore, and the influence her vicinity had upon him, sudden, subtle, and searching as such influences are, convinced him that she was the soul of goodness and purity. Notwithstanding he was impelled to look at her oftener than good taste should have permitted, she betrayed no consciousness of his presence and scrutiny. With her was a very tall, pompous, white-haired, elderly gentleman.

Harold soon found that in coming from his own church to this, he had jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire. The clergyman had a face which would have been the fortune of an actor, and the gleam of his eye betokened no small degree of humour. His clerk quite put him in the shade, however. He was a very old man. Some ninety winters had denuded his head of any

ornament, and had added to the lower part of his face heavy folds of flesh, and seamed it all over with wrinkles. When he closed his ancient lips over his toothless gums, the wrinkles on his cheeks caused him to appear as if he were chuckling to himself in intense merriment, and this expression he preserved during the whole of the service, when he was not engaged in uttering the responses. His responses were so painfully slow, that everybody finished before him, and his pastor patiently waited while he finished them all by himself in a quavering treble, raised in pitch on the last two syllables. Any long verse in the psalms was a sore trial to him, but he would struggle manfully through it.

Harold's gravity which, in spite of himself, had been rather disturbed by the ex-

traordinary way the service was conducted, was almost entirely put to rout when an exceptionally long verse occurred. The clerk was so hopelessly behind that he stopped in the middle, and then when the congregation had finished, he took it up where he had left off, and read right through to the end by himself, in an inimitable expostulatory tone.

When one's risible faculties are once tickled in a place where they ought not to be indulged, they immediately become very troublesome. Harold listened attentively to a thoroughly good sermon, one which it was an honour to preach and a privilege to hear, carefully keeping his eyes away both from the clerk's face, with its ridiculous expression, and, with greater difficulty from the face of the unknown young lady. As an illustration of

his sermon, the preacher unfortunately told a story, which was rather too humorous for the pulpit. He said with immovable gravity,

“I was called upon last winter, my friends, to preach a special sermon at one of the most out-of-the-way places in this county—Topplesby. Now the nearest way to get to it from where I was staying was by driving, as the rail did not go near me. So, my friends, I hired a pony and trap. Now, I did not know the road, so I provided myself with an ordnance map, and carefully studied the route. But by-and-by, when I had got among the intricate country lanes, I found my ordnance map only puzzled me, and finally I lost my way. Fortunately, I met with a countryman journeying along the road, and I said to him, ‘Can you tell

me the way to Topplesby Station?' He said,

" 'Go straight on for a mile and a half, and then take the turn to the right.' So I went on as straight as I could for a mile and a half, and took a turn to the right. Alas! my friends, it led nowhere, save to a farm-house. I said to the good people who lived there, 'Can you tell me the way to Topplesby Station?' They said, 'You have come the wrong way. You must go back for two miles, and then ask your way.'

"I went back again, my friends, for two miles, and presently I saw a man and I said to him, 'Can you tell me the way to Topplesby Station?' and he said to me, 'You have come the wrong way, you must go along that road until you come to a white house, and opposite to that is a public house.

When you get there you must ask again.' So I went along the road, as directed, until I came to the white house and the public house opposite, and I said to them there, 'Can you tell me the way to Toppleby Station?' and they said to me, 'You have come out of your way. You must go back again for half a mile, and take the turn to the left.' So I went back again, but I saw no turn to the left. I called to a man at work in a field, and, my friends, I said to him, 'Can you tell me the way to Toppleby Station?' and he said to me, 'You have come wrong. You must go back again, until you come to a white house and opposite that is a public house.' Well, my friends, I felt very sad, for it was becoming very dark, and it seemed as if I were fated to be thrown backwards and forwards like a shuttlecock along those

country lanes, without getting any nearer to Topplesby Station. At last, just as I was despairing, I caught sight of a sign-post, and on it was written, 'To Topplesby Station.' Then, my friends, I went on my way rejoicing. Do you know the way to Heaven? This" (holding up the Bible) "is the sign-post. The Wesleyan directs you one road, the Baptist another, the High Churchman, and the Low Churchman will tell you to take different paths ; but to go right, you must take the guidance of the Bible," and so on.

Before this anecdote was over, everybody in the church was smiling, except a very serious young man, exactly opposite Harold, in the same pew, who having his Sunday behaviour on with his Sunday clothes, remained very stiff and firm. Harold was doing his utmost to hide his laughter, and

not succeeding, had stooped forward to hide his face below the level of the pew. At this juncture, the serious young man's gravity suddenly gave way, and ducking his head with the same object as Harold, their craniums came sharply into contact with each other. Harold looked up towards the tall young lady, and caught her eye sparkling with suppressed laughter. The glance they interchanged seemed to Harold to be a sort of preliminary introduction. At all events, she would know him by sight now.

The old clerk's lips had parted in a smile, and this elongated the wrinkles of his face in such a manner as to give him the appearance of crying over his pastor's misfortunes.

The worst was yet to come. The service closed with a hymn, and as they were

singing, Harold incautiously leaned heavily against the door of the pew, which gave way and made him take a sudden and unpremeditated step into the aisle, causing no little noise. Ashamed of his general misbehaviour (which yet was no fault of his own), he hurried away as soon as he could.

That night he dreamed of the unknown young lady, and all the week long he thought of her. On the following Sunday he went again to the same church, but she was not there. On the Monday, he was strolling down the High Street at lunch time, when his attention was arrested by a ragged, but remarkably pretty, little girl, gazing wistfully into a confectioner's window. He stopped and watched her, and she looked so hungry and pitiful, that he said to her.

"My dear, would you like to have some of those nice things to eat?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Then come in with me, and you shall have what you like."

The wondering child followed him in, and they took a seat in one of the boxes. The superb young ladies behind the counter looked disdainfully at his companion, and brought him the two basins of soup which he ordered, with an air which awed the little girl.

The waitress not having brought him any rolls, and not attending very briskly to his order, he said to her,

"Now, my dear, it is really too bad of you to keep me waiting in this way. You wouldn't keep your sweetheart waiting so long, if he asked you for a kiss."

"I haven't got such a thing," she answered with a toss of her curls.

"Faith! haven't you, then will you have me? I want a sweetheart awfully."

"If you were handsome I might," said she, as she moved away.

"Please, Sir, may I take this roll home to mother?" said Harold's little *protégée* to him.

"You shall take home something better than that. Have you a father?"

"Yes, but he's always drunk, and beats mother."

"How many brothers and sisters have you got?"

"One sister, please, Sir, but she's on the streets."

"Whew! How old are you, little one?"

"Eleven, Sir."

"Well, mind you are a good girl. Take one of those tarts. If I were to give you five shillings, what would you do with it?"

"Buy something to eat for mother."

"Well, here are two half-crowns. Give them to your mother, and don't tell your father. Now, toddle," and patting her cheek, he dismissed her, clasping her treasure tightly in her hand.

Two ladies rose from the next box, where they must have heard every word that had passed. To Harold's horror, one of them was the fair unknown who had occupied such a place in his thoughts during the past week. He blushed (really) celestial, rosy red, and felt as hot as fire. The lady with her was an elderly, but very gentle and sweet expressioned lady. She addressed Harold, and

said, with a grace that did away with all suggestion of impertinence,

"Pray excuse me, Sir, but I am sure you will allow an old woman like me to tell you that indiscriminate alms-giving is to be avoided. You should make yourself acquainted with the merits of any case before you relieve. You would do more real good so."

"Madam," answered Harold, "I acknowledge the justice of your remark. May I plead as a justification of myself, that I followed the impulse of the moment."

He would gladly have carried the conversation further, but with a bow (from *her* as well, he was delighted to see) they left him.

"Confound it, she heard me chaff this waitress," and he bolted out of the shop, to re-enter in a minute with,

"Pray can you tell me who those ladies are?"

"Mrs. and Miss Stanhope of 'The Grange.'"

"Thanks."

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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